THE

GENIUS OF WORDSWORTH

HARMONIZED WITH

THE WISDOM AND INTEGRITY

OF

HIS REVIEWERS.

BY THE LATE JOHN WRIGHT,

AUTHOR OF

"POETRY SACRED AND PROFANE."

LONDON:

LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, AND LONGMANS.

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PREFACE.

FEW people read a Preface; and still fewer, if it be long. Not caring to offend such prejudice, this shall be short. But I would respectfully intimate that, to understand the design of the following pages, it will be necessary to peruse it. In a volume I published a year ago, entitled "Poetry Sacred and Profane," were included some imitations of Wordsworth, together with a satire, called "Pastimes with the late Poet Laureate." As an apology for the latter, I prefixed to the verse an "Introduction," containing a summary of *the Poet's* character. This gave serious offence to that inflated tribe of public censors, termed reviewers; and they castigated me unmercifully, — one craving a "stone-bow," to hit me in the eye, or, in the event of failure, a scaffold — on which I might expiate my crime. The "Morning Post" led the van; then followed "Tait," "Fraser," "The Literary Gazette," "The Critic," and a host of servile imitators — amongst which appeared the "Nottinghamshire Guardian," whose exploits on the occasion afforded no little amusement in this neighbourhood. Its proprietor aspired but to an echo of the "Morning Post;" but none of the literary junto connected with the journal could furnish even that. He heard of a disciple of the Lake school, who, with a

creditable amount of scholarship, could swallow as much laudanum with impunity as did Coleridge. This man was invited to the task; and he achieved it as might have been expected of one under the habitual influence of a deadly narcotic. Confiding in the integrity of my own cause, I replied to the local critic, when the proprietor of the "Nottinghamshire Guardian," seeing the hopelessness of his position ,dismissed his new ally.

Here Mr. Wright's engagement on his own little work closed from fast increasing bodily necessities; and the explanation which he was unable to complete must be thus shortly supplied. Soon after the appearance of a Reply to the article contained in the "Nottinghamshire Guardian," Mr. Wright proposed to enter upon a yet more elaborate consideration of Wordsworth's character as a Poet, with a view to justify the course he had already adopted. His design was accomplished in the Essay concluding this work. Declining health, however, for some time prevented Mr. Wright from making a fair transcript of what he had written; nor was this effected until a few days before his death, which occurred on the seventeenth of February, 1853. Regarding his last treatise as a continuation of the subject occupying the earlier publications, it was Mr. Wright's intention to print it, accompanied, in the order of their composition, by the "Introduction" to his poems, and the "Reply." This arrangement it has been thought right still to observe; and there only remains to regret that it was not permitted him to fulfil a task which no other hand can perform as well.

E.

NOTTINGHAM,
April 19. 1853.

INTRODUCTION

TO

THE VOLUME ENTITLED "POETRY, SACRED AND PROFANE."

It cannot be pleaded, in extenuation of the faults that criticism may discover in the following poems, that they were written in the days of my youth, while yet reflection had curbed not the intemperance of passion; for not one of them was constructed before I had entered on my fortieth year. And as it seldom happens that a man *begins* to exercise the faculty of imagination at that period of his life, the reader may be curious to know why the usual course of things has been reversed in me. The story is simple, and may be soon told. Until then excessive irritability, combined with constitutional powers of endurance that few enjoy, prompted me daily to physical pursuits very far exceeding the demands of a laborious profession. A seeming superfluity of nervous impulse was my inheritance; and preferring the pure atmosphere of the fields to that artificial mode of existence which the usages of society impose, my delight was to expend it

in walks which, were I circumstantially to record them, might be thought by many to exceed the bounds of credibility. As time, however, progressed, though as yet sensible of no diminution of nervous activity, a growing inaptitude for vigorous exercise was discoverable, and I sought, in retirement, to profit by a long train of previous observation. In spite of a prejudice imbibed, on reaching manhood, against poetry, for reasons that involve some little reflection on lovely woman—a prejudice so strong that, for nearly twenty years, I would neither read, nor suffer to be read to me, any production of the Divine Art, I now began to meditate in verse. Progressively my evenings became more and more devoted to this amusement; and when those who feared that the pursuit might endanger my health enjoined rest, the only reply I could offer was that of the Roman Poet, *verum nequeo dormire;* and dreading a worse imputation, *aut insanit homo, aut versus facit,* I have occupied my leisure in the cultivation of elegant literature, with such intervals of relaxation as the kindred pursuit of gardening has required, throughout the last ten years. For a long time the fruit of my labour was distributed amongst personal friends, and entertaining not then the remotest idea of its publication, I cared not even to transcribe for my own use much that was so disposed of. At length my applicants became too numerous and pressing in their demands upon me to admit of like respect being paid to all; and to avoid their importunities, I promised in due time to supply them, in a more convenient form, with a copy of such pieces as should be thought worthy of preservation. My design was to defer

this intention for two years longer, — until, indeed, I should have written something more truly entitled to public notice: but disease occurring upon what had now become a severe study, and that, too, of a character from which danger was to be apprehended, I resolved thus prematurely to select from amongst my papers such poems as should, for the most part, contribute to the moral and intellectual benefit of my readers. To attempt an apology for their defects would be affectation: for though they are not all what I could have wished them to be, the chief of them have been written with much care; and they do but occasionally fall short of that standard which I have prescribed to myself, by reason of my inability at all times to attain to it.

An inquiry into the relative merit of our most esteemed modern Poets soon led to my conviction that, whilst in the legitimate exercise of the imagination, in strength and dignity of expression, and depth of feeling, Byron surpasses all others, so too is he the best artist. And since my predilection for subjects in which Nature exhibits her fairest aspect, will serve to protect me from the charge of having appropriated his ideas, I may with less hesitation declare that, in the general structure of my verse, I have taken him as affording the best model. Of this privilege I have sportively availed myself as well, occasionally, at the cost of both Shelley and Wordsworth, than whom, perhaps, no two authors can be found more unlike: — the one luxuriating in a redundancy of imagination, — the other driven to all manner of pitiful expedients to identify himself with its possession. Let those who shall object to the boldness

of this assertion, in respect of the late Poet Laureate, turn to some stanzas headed "Resolution and Independence," upon which he bestowed *many careful revisions.* And were it needed, I might further justify an allusion to this piece, by reference to the declaration of Wordsworth's great expositor, Coleridge, that "this fine poem is especially characteristic of the author." Not to enter upon an elaborate critique, which would carry me beyond the limits necessarily assigned to this Introduction, I would remark that the Poet opens his subject by the somewhat startling assurance that "there was a roaring in the wind all night," and "the rain fell in floods:" "but now the sun is rising," "the birds are singing," "the sky rejoices," "the grass is bright with rain-drops," and "the hare is running races in her mirth." Then immediately changing his tense, he writes —

"I was a Traveller then upon the moor,
I saw the hare that raced about with joy;
I heard the woods and distant waters roar;
Or heard them not, as happy as a boy:
The pleasant season did my heart employ:
My old remembrances went from me wholly;
And all the ways of men, so vain and melancholy.

"But, as it sometimes chanceth, from the might
Of joy in minds that can no further go,
As high as we have mounted in delight
In our dejection do we sink as low;
To me that morning did it happen so;
And fears and fancies thick upon me came;
Dim sadness — and blind thoughts, I knew not, nor could name."

Now I appeal to the understanding of Wordsworth's admirers, whether this be a creditable performance? What *burlesque* upon English versification could be *seemingly* more intentional? And the first and second stanzas only, out of twenty of which the piece consists, are superior to the two I have quoted. Pardoning his violation of good taste, where he has attempted to be poetical, and taking the entire in the light of a simple narrative, it abounds with self-contradictions, absurdities, and silly iterations, conveyed in language that would do dishonour to an uneducated mechanic; and it more faithfully represents the rudeness of our literature in the time of Chaucer than the refinement to which it has attained in the nineteenth century. Though free to admit as are his enthusiastic friends, that the *motive* which directed Wordsworth in all his literary labours was such as to entitle him to public esteem, I nevertheless maintain that he lacked those qualities of the mind which are essential to the service in which he engaged. And as many, who have perhaps been less careful in reading him than I have, may be disposed to condemn the severity with which he is treated in a satire called "Pastimes with the late Poet Laureate," it is but right that I defend its publication, by argument based upon a familiarity with his works. In the absence of such necessity, however, no objection could be fairly offered to my strictures, whether directed in prose or verse: for, be it remembered, the Poet was himself free to criticise both the living and the dead. And I have the less delicacy to consult in the prosecution of my design, since his removal from the sphere in which he long laboured, has placed him alike beyond the reach of

praise and censure. His writings, as are those of every man that survive their author, are to be regarded now as a public legacy: nor is it too much to say that he bequeathed them for the accomplishment of a great and good purpose. He believed them to be "profitable for instruction;" and though made the sport of critics through a long life, he acquired a party which, if not large, had all the advantages that talent, wealth, and station could command. Under such auspices, he gained an elevation, to which his character as a poet by no means entitled him; and the few disciples he had already numbered, conceiving their great prototype to have earned his distinction, strove the more carefully to imitate his indefiniteness of expression, while the school to which they belonged boasted of increasing adherents. No judicious reader can look upon the inane metrical verbiage now palmed upon the fashionable world as poetry, without feeling painfully conscious that the patronage conferred upon Wordsworth was a national misfortune. None knew better than himself how greatly it tended to strengthen the confidence of his followers in the fancied purity of his style: hence, in a letter to a friend, he says "Tennyson is decidedly the first of our living poets." — "You will be pleased to hear that he expressed in the strongest terms *his gratitude to my writings.*" To have attained what would seem to imply preeminence in the republic of letters, notwithstanding the contempt with which his puerilities were treated, was, after all, no mean achievement for a man of his limited genius. He owed it mainly to patient, untiring industry: for having no susceptibility that allowed him either to be provoked to resentment, or to be crushed

into torpor, he plodded on in pursuit of his favourite amusement, until his claims to preferment could be no longer resisted. In him was assuredly exemplified the truth of the proverb —

> nil sine magno
> Vita labore dedit mortalibus.

Added to industry was an inviolable regard for truth; and it pleased him to provide lessons for those who respect

> "the good old age
> When Fancy was Truth's willing Page;
> And Truth would skim the flowery glade,
> Though entering but as Fancy's Shade."

Poetry, however, is "*impassioned truth;*" and he who invests heroes and peasants alike with meekness; who, when accounting Rob Roy "*wise* as brave," deems it necessary to crave forgiveness, "if the phrase be strong;" who, on one hand, would *appear* to be shocked at the discovery of a Robin* in chase of a butterfly, while, on the other, he can address a sexton over

* "Art thou the bird whom man loves best,
The pious bird with the scarlet breast,
Our little English Robin;
. . . . . .
The bird, who by some name or other
All men who know thee call their brother,
The darling of children and men?
Could Father Adam open his eyes
And see this sight beneath the skies,
He'd wish to close them again."

the remains of his late acquaintance in language * at which a cultivated mind almost revolts, obviously betrays a want of that faculty of the soul from which all true poetry springs,—*feeling*—*intense, well disciplined feeling.* And such was Wordsworth! Shall I yet be told that evidence of tender emotion may be gleaned from his verse? Then it is surely to be found in his lament for the dead; for under no circumstances can it be more truly affirmed that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Here is an example:—

"She dwelt among the untrodden ways
Beside the springs of Dove,
A Maid whom there were none to praise,
And very few to love.

"A violet by a mossy stone
Half hidden from the eye!
—Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky.

"She lived unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be;
But she is in her grave, and, Oh!
The difference to me!"

The worth of this outpouring of a "wounded spirit" will be best estimated, when compared with an affecting

* "Mark the spot to which I point!
From this platform, eight feet square,
Take not even a finger-joint.
Andrew's whole fire-side is there.
. . . . .
Thus then, each to other dear,
Let them all in quiet lie,
Andrew there, and Susan here,
Neighbours in mortality."

passage from Othello's soliloquy over the body of Desdemona, where Emilia seeks admission to the Moor.

"If she come in, she'll sure speak to my wife:
My wife! my wife! what wife? — I have no wife:
O, insupportable, O heavy hour!"

Some will be ready to denounce the comparison as invidious: it may possibly admit of such construction:

Quid enim contendat hirondo cycnis?

That justice then may be done, I will select a stanza from Wordsworth's elegiac verses on the death of a brother, and place it in juxtaposition with another on a like melancholy subject, taken from a contemporary author, whom he declared to be deficient in feeling.

"Full soon in sorrow did I weep,
Taught that the mutual hope was dust,
In sorrow, but for higher trust,
How miserably deep!
All vanished in a single word,
A breath, a sound, and scarcely heard,
Sea — Ship — drowned — Shipwreck — so it came,
The meek, the brave, the good, was gone;
He who had been our living John
Was nothing but a name."

"Scion of chiefs and monarchs, where art thou?
Fond hope of many nations, art thou dead?
Could not the grave forget thee, and lay low
Some less majestic, less beloved head?
In the sad midnight, while thy heart still bled,
The mother of a moment, o'er thy boy,
Death hushed that pang for ever: with thee fled
The present happiness and promised joy
Which filled the imperial isles so full it seemed to cloy."

What man, in whom the moral and intellectual faculties are so nicely harmonized as to bring him under the due influence of language, will not feel a secret prompting to merriment on reading the first stanza? Yet he shall no sooner pass from that to the one which succeeds it than, under the solemnity inspired by associations of the utmost moment, his heart shall swell with irrepressible anguish.

Premising thus much, there is little difficulty in accounting for the feebleness that pervades nearly the whole of Wordsworth's verse. Not so easy, perhaps, is it to explain its *anomalous* character. Every one is aware that there are seasons when, from various causes, the senses fail to afford us an adequate conception of the objects presented to our notice. With the habitually apathetic this must be the prevailing condition. "That strong feeling of interest and curiosity which we call attention" is, in them, only to be excited by "moving accidents." They may appear to regard passing events; but faint and imperfect will be the impressions made upon their minds, and even these will be quickly forgotten. The observation of people so constituted is radically defective; and failing in that, the suggestive principle, as it is termed, seldom rewards them with a profitable train of thought. This, I need hardly say, is a temperament as unlike the poetical as was Wordsworth unlike Byron. Nature designed not the late Poet Laureate for the purpose of song: but he had a morbid ambition to be thought a poet, and no man to whom enthusiasm has been denied, ever toiled so long and so patiently after such distinction. "Exempt from public haunt," he sought "tongues in trees,

books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in every thing;" but, seeing as "through a glass darkly," his images were confused, and, like the changing cloud, they rarely sustained an appreciable aspect. Hence the frequent recurrence of such passages as the following:—

> "Such seemed this Man, *not all alive nor dead,*
> *Nor all asleep*—in his extreme old age:"
>
> "And to myself I seem to muse on One
> By sorrow laid asleep; or borne away,
> *A human being destined to awake*
> *To human life, or something very near*
> *To human life*"—
>
> "*Calm* did he sit under the wide-spread tree
> Of his old age; and yet *less calm and meek,*
> *Winningly meek or venerably calm,*
> Than slow and torpid;"

Intent, at all times, on the maintenance of his right to the first seat in the Temple of the Muses, the Laureate would remind his readers, as occasion should serve, of the deference due to him as *the Poet;* but especially did he claim preeminence as *the Poet of Nature.* In this capacity I find him "haunting" the "green shade" of "Rydalian Laurels" through all seasons in search of "ground-flowers;"—and it may not be uninteresting to inquire with what bountifulness Nature lavished instruction upon him in such rambles. While thus engaged, it is satisfactory as well to learn that, whether following him in the neighbourhood of Rydal, or on a delicate expedition, when his

> "——horse moved on; hoof after hoof
> He raised, and never stopped,"

the charge of unfairness cannot properly be imputed to me: for, in *the Poet's* dedication of "Peter Bell" to Southey, he says "pains have been taken at different times to make the production less unworthy of a favourable reception; or, rather, to fit it for filling *permanently* a station, however humble, in the literature of our country. This has, indeed, been the aim of all my endeavours in poetry, which, you know, have been sufficiently laborious to prove that I deem the Art not lightly to be approached." What then, I ask, could be better suited to the musings of our author than a day in Spring? Inspired, accordingly, with the music of the grove, he regrets the general distaste for pleasure of so pure a kind, and lapses into the following strain: —

"Through primrose tufts, in that green bower,
The periwinkle trailed its wreaths;
And 'tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.

"The birds around me hopped and played,
Their thoughts I cannot measure:—
But the least motion that they made,
It seemed a thrill of pleasure.

"The budding twigs spread out their fan,
To catch the breezy air;
And I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there."

Now with all my respect for the good intentions of the Laureate, I cannot help thinking he was somewhat hard upon "Peter Bell," because

"A primrose by a river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him,
And it was nothing more"—

for, in how far would the suggestions of *the Poet's* primrose have exceeded Peter's if he might have spoken for himself? Peter would have been found sufficiently philosophic to say that the plant appeared to "joy" pretty well; and that is all we are told by *the Poet.* It would be unjust to say that he never does more. We learn elsewhere that

> "Long as there's a sun that sets,
> Primroses will have their glory."

Nor are we left long to conjecture in what their glory consists; since *the Poet* soon after, in addressing his favourite flower (pilewort), says:

> "While the patient primrose sits
> *Like a beggar in the cold,*
> Thou, a flower of wiser wits,
> Slip'st into thy sheltering hold."

Little cause would Nature have to congratulate herself on the acquisition of a devotee, who should *thus* treat her dispensations, whether in the character of poet or naturalist. Pilewort (*Ranunculus ficaria*), called by the earlier botanists little celandine, is a plant of almost universal prevalence; but it first blooms in the most sheltered situations, as in the copse, along the sunny margin of woods, and in hedgerows, where it may be seen to gladden the hearts of children so early as February, in a mild winter. And these are precisely the localities in which the primrose is found. It may be discovered as well by "a river's brim," *where Shelley also found the violet;* but it is doubtful whether Nature planted it there; such is rather the work of man's "*meddling intellect.*" On the contrary, pilewort may be

seen, as the Spring advances, to flourish further, and yet further from a place of shelter, until it beautifies the fields with its golden bloom, even to the "river's brim." The four vulgar lines I have quoted, therefore, betray no less inattention to the natural habits of these plants, than depravity of taste in the employment of the simile. Perhaps there is no form of expression that subjects the genius of a writer to so severe a test as one of comparison: yet is it that which the unskilful artist is sure to attempt. From a refined source "similes are sparkling ornaments:" Wordsworth, conceiving that they might be elaborated after a more homely fashion, presents us with the following: —

> "I kissed his cheek before he died;
> And when his breath was fled,
> I raised, while kneeling by his side,
> His hand:—*it dropped like lead.*
> Your hands, dear Little-ones, do all
> That can be done, will never fall
> *Like his till they are dead.*"
>
> "For calm and gentle is his mien;
> *Like a dead Boy he is serene.*"
>
> "His limbs would toss about him with *delight*,
> *Like branches when strong winds the trees annoy.*"
>
> "That tall Man, a giant in bulk and in height,
> Not an inch of his body is free from delight;
> Can he keep himself still, if he would? oh, not he!
> *The music stirs in him like wind through a tree.*"

But to dilate on *the Poet's* inelegances were an endless task: his verse consists of little else. I will be content to follow him as the simple interpreter of Nature: and now "it is the first mild day of March;"

the robin is singing beside his door; and in anticipation of an intellectual feast, he conjures his sister to lay aside her book, put on her "woodland dress," and accompany him in his walk. "One moment now," he writes,

> "may give us more
> Than years of toiling reason:
> Our minds shall drink at every pore
> The spirit of the season."

After so startling a metaphor, it is natural to look for results correspondent to the occasion. But where are they? Of a truth he gave the day "to idleness;" or drinking "the spirit of the season" with his accustomed relish, he wasted its inspiration upon vapid rhyme. Again he longs to be abroad; and craving the society of a friend, absorbed in studies for which *the Poet* had little taste, he thus addresses him:

> "Books! 'tis a dull and endless strife:
> Come, hear the woodland linnet,
> How sweet his music! on my life,
> There's more of wisdom in it."
>
> "And hark! how blithe the throstle sings!
> He, too, is no mean preacher:
> Come forth into the light of things,
> Let Nature be your teacher."

For one who was habitually cautious in the use of language, this may be considered a pretty bold freak of fancy; and but for the colloquial form of their construction, the stanzas would have been unobjectionable. Having ventured so far, he determined for once to attest the moral supremacy of Nature:

"One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can."

How those dignitaries of the Church who have concurred in the laudations bestowed upon Wordsworth, reconcile themselves to this expression "*of sentiment and reflection*" I am at a loss to determine! It was held by a learned divine*, known to some of them, that poetry always says too much or too little; and had he been one of the Laureate's acquaintance, it is fair to presume that he would have whispered in his ear the memorable passage of Lactantius: Totum autem, quod referas, fingere; id est ineptum esse et mendacem, potius quam poetam.

Apart from all consideration of poetical embellishment, I look in vain to Wordsworth for instruction. *Few* of his pieces impart it: and the little *they* contain is generally so much diluted with superfluous expletives, as to leave it doubtful whether my gain be commensurate with the time and attention occupied in searching for it. I adduce "the Thorn" for example — a poem greatly admired by advocates of the Lake school. And it *is pretty:* so that if men can find amusement in a mere play upon words, I wonder not that this should delight them. Unfortunately for those who are not thus easily pleased, the first four lines present a glaring absurdity:

"There is a thorn — it looks so old,
In truth you'd find it hard to say
How it could ever have been young,
It looks so old and grey."

* Dr. Adam Clarke.

The burthen of the story is this: twenty years previously, one Martha Ray was courted by Stephen Hill; pregnancy ensued; and Stephen espoused another. Six months after, Martha was to be seen often repairing to this "Thorn," overgrown as it was with moss and lichens,

> "High on a mountain's highest ridge,
> Where oft the stormy winter gale
> Cuts like a scythe."

Martha had lost her senses; and "at all times of the day and night" would she go thither. "Sad case," observes *the Poet*,

> "for such a brain to hold
> Communion with a stirring child!"

When born, none knew how this child was disposed of: some thought she "hanged" it on "the Thorn,"—others that she drowned it in "a little muddy pond" just by, — but all agreed that

> "A beauteous heap, a hill of moss,
> Just half a foot in height,"

> "And close beside this aged Thorn,"

denoted its final resting-place. Twenty-two stanzas, of eleven lines each, involving a tautology that has no parallel in the writings of any other man, are employed in relating the incidents I have mentioned. But he does worse than this: and in proof of my assertion, I refer to his "Anecdote for Fathers," in which he says he has a boy of five years old, with whom he walked and talked one morning, as was his custom, with their 'quiet home all full in view." His own musings

recurred to Kilve's delightful shore, where they had resided a year previously. Kilve he thought "was a favoured place, and so is Liswyn farm." "In very idleness" he asked the boy whether he preferred to be on "Kilve's smooth shore," or at "Liswyn farm?" At Kilve, was the answer. Why? the boy knew not why; and being pressed for a reason, he "hung down his head" and "blushed with shame," but remained silent. Three times the interrogatory was put; when the boy raised his head, and seeing a vane upon the housetop, replied —

> "At Kilve there was no weathercock;
> And that's the reason why."

Pleased with this evidence of childish sagacity, he exclaims —

> "O dearest, dearest boy! my heart
> For better lore would seldom yearn,
> Could I but teach the hundredth part
> Of what from thee I learn."

If *the Poet's* admirers be sufficiently versed in the profound to discover the worth attached to this revelation, they can better deal with the problematical than I can. To me it would seem that for the sake of bringing this child into ridicule, fifteen stanzas were written, which, whether viewed in regard to their meanness of diction, or poverty of idea, should serve as well to show that he was the veritable son of the writer.

These reflections, then, I submit as an apology for the "Imitations" of Wordsworth, and the "Pastimes" as well, which are to be found in this volume. Not the least objectionable feature in the Laureate's character as

a poet, was his love of intercourse with plebeians of the lowest grade, as Betty Foy and Susan Gale, Goody Blake and Harry Gill, Alice Fell, Peter Bell, and others equally vulgar. Offended at the high pretensions of the man whose chief aim was, in the form of ballad, to perpetuate trifling incidents derived from such sources, it need not excite surprise that Byron should thus have sneered at him:

> "'Pedlars,' and 'boats,' and 'waggons!' Oh! ye shades
> Of Pope and Dryden, are we come to this?"

He would, however, have been excusable in his choice of subjects, if he had taken care to clothe them with the extrinsic ornaments of poetry. This it was his duty to do: but he degraded the peasantry around him; for instead of telling us that

> "Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
> Their sober wishes never learned to stray,"

he too often exhibits humanity in its worst phase; and, as in the instance of Goody Blake, he is not less unfortunate, occasionally, in his attempt "to point a moral." Prompted by a desire to adapt his language to the characters with whom he had to deal, he acquired a depraved habit of writing, even when engaged on a loftier theme; until at length he "vulgarized sublimity." Always obscure, and taxing himself with the selection of words and phrases that neither the learned nor the unlearned would have chosen, he became an object of derision amongst all classes. Will any one be hold enough to contend that his *was* the language in popular use? Then I ask in what part of her Majesty's dominions I

shall find men so silly as to say they "espy" whatever they look at! Yet was it *the Poet's* custom to "espy" every thing; save where he deemed it right to qualify the admission, and then he "seemeth to espy," as did all those to whom he imputed the faculty of vision. Were the subject still worth prosecuting, I might accumulate abundant evidence to prove, if that be not already done, that he was essentially a wrong-headed man. None other would have designated Thomson's "a vicious style;" and believing the whole tenor of his writings to merit the stigma he sought to affix on the "Seasons," I consider it my duty to counsel young and inexperienced writers to avoid his example. Efforts may be made by surviving friends to prolong his fame; but in fifty years hence it will be scarcely known that such a man has lived; and I will hazard a further prediction, that the simple, unpretending Bloomfield will be read when Wordsworth shall have been forgotten.

A REPLY

TO

AN ARTICLE ON MR. WRIGHT'S "POETRY, SACRED AND PROFANE,"

AS CONTAINED IN THE "NOTTINGHAMSHIRE GUARDIAN" OF OCT. 30. 1851.

THE history of mankind affords abundant evidence of the fact, that in proportion to the magnitude of a popular error, and the amount of individual zeal for its correction, is the measure of ingratitude and abuse commonly awarded in return. Such has been the recompense of discoverers in science, of great moral teachers, of social and political reformers; and it would seem to be the lot of any that shall dare to challenge the pretensions of an acknowledged authority in literature. Nor does it inspire one with a very lofty conception of human justice to find that, whilst an inquiry into the writings of a man appointed by the State to an office of intellectual distinction, and paid out of the public Treasury for sustaining it, though conducted openly, avowedly, and in the true spirit of criticism, shall subject its author to the charge of literary treason, the meanest hireling in our

periodical literature, under the plea of established usage, shall claim the right of covertly assailing him, in reply, with the foulest vituperation that malignancy can suggest. In publishing my strictures on the genius and versification of Wordsworth, I was not unaware that I should expose myself to the risk of such treatment: warning upon warning reached me from intelligent friends; but it is no part of my policy to compromise my independence, and I chose to express my convictions in so undisguised a form as should make me personally answerable for their enunciation. No sooner had my volume, entitled "Poetry Sacred and Profane," appeared, than the rabid partisans of the prevailing school of poetry visited me with their utmost indignation. Foremost in the onslaught stood an arrogant reviewer in the "Morning Post" — that feeble, impotent representative of a political code under which industry pined, and virtue long, *too long*, sorrowed in our streets. This was but natural. To the principles advocated in the "Morning Post" the Lake Poets were professedly attached. Coleridge, who, until degraded by vice that would have ruined a yet brighter intellect, is said to have been the most powerful writer of the party, was employed upon it for some time; and I honour the feeling that prompted the editor, in remembrance of his past services, to come to the rescue of Wordsworth in his extremity. In the late Laureate's success Coleridge was deeply interested; for whether hired to the work or not, he is best known in the republic of letters for his special pleading on Wordsworth's behalf. But though inclined to make due allowance for the sympathy entertained by the "Morning Post" for the imperilled repu-

tation of the late Laureate, I have little cause to respect the *mode* in which it has been exercised. Conscious of his inability to refute the argument by which I had arrived at a just appreciation of *the Poet's* merit, the reviewer sought refuge in the well known classical proverb —

qui rem facias, rem,
Si possis, recte; si non, quocunque modo rem,

and lavished upon me a torrent of brutal invective that has hardly a parallel in the annals of criticism. So gross an outrage would have been less surprising, if I had availed myself of the collateral testimony of the biographer, when dealing with the subject on which I happen to be at issue with established opinion. I *might* have shown that the selfishness which uniformly distinguished *the Poet* through a long life, as witnessed in the little concern he manifested for his best friends, was in keeping with the affectation of sensibility betrayed in his verse. I *might* have placed him in a yet more unenviable position, by alluding to the heartless manner in which he would disparage the literary productions of one who, in all the gifts and graces that most liken man to his Maker, was vastly his superior.* I *might* have illustrated his self-sufficiency by reference to the contempt he avowed for nearly all authorities in literature, whether ancient or modern. And I *might* have involved him further in depravity of sentiment, by quoting the fact that he would wantonly cut a new and valuable book with a knife that had been recently besmeared with butter! Thus much had been related of him by others:

* Robert Southey.

but I declined to pursue *the Poet*, through the relations of social life, except for the sake of conveying my unfeigned admiration of the *motive* that governed his literary career. My dealing was with the character of his *writings*; and for having presumed to exercise the right of individual judgment in the most unexceptionable manner I could devise, the "Morning Post" has attacked me with a scurrility that would have subjected its author to the penalty of fine or imprisonment, if he had personally addressed it to me in the streets of London.

Encouraged by the impunity with which such outrage may be committed, the "Nottinghamshire Guardian" has published an article exceeding in virulence, if possible, that of the "Morning Post." It is no part of my intention to retaliate after a like manner. An insult that may be so easily repelled by the aid of reason would be ill redressed by low ribaldry. Identified as is my assailant with the cause of agricultural protection and its associate interests, it is with singular infelicity that he sneers at my contributions to pastoral poetry. His zeal in the very onset outstrips his prudence: for disregarding the fact that Wordsworth's fame is based on the supposed ability with which he has treated butterflies, robins, larks, sparrows' nests, and pet lambs, he charges me with self-exaggeration, because I have been able to gratify my friends with a poetical description of snowdrops, crocuses, hyacinths, spring flowers, &c. As well might he revile Theocritus for having entertained his friends with similar effusions.*

* Καὶ τὸ ῥόδον καλόν ἐστι, καὶ ὁ χρόνος αὐτὸ μαραίνει·
Καὶ τὸ ἴον καλόν ἐστιν ἐν εἴαρι, καὶ ταχὺ γηρᾷ·
Λευκὸν τὸ κρίνον ἐστί, μαραίνεται ἀνίκα πίπτῃ·

I profess only to have pleased my personal acquaintance, as may be learned by reference to the early part of my "Introduction." And in what respect have I offended good taste by submitting my verses, as was also Wordsworth's habit, to the consideration of my literary connexions, before engaging to publish them? The practice is of great antiquity, and has, moreover, the sanction of universal custom. But my reviewer in the "Guardian," though perhaps objecting not to this course in principle, regrets its observance on my part, because I have been tempted by the "flattery of friendship" to publish much that was admired, and thus throw myself "on the sharp weapons of criticism." If it be any consolation, in his anxiety on my account, to be faithfully dealt with, I can assure him that unless such "weapons" come better sharpened than are those from *his* armory, I shall have little reason to bewail my friends' applause, or my own temerity. With a bravery equal to that of the redoubtable critic of the "Morning Post," the hero of the "Guardian" bounces and fulminates, in the hope to fill me with horrid apprehensions, for having written

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Ἁ δὲ χιὼν λευκὰ, καὶ τάκεται ἀνίκα παχθῇ·
Καὶ κάλλος καλόν ἐστι τὸ παιδικόν, ἀλλ' ὀλίγον ζῇ.

Idyl. xxiii. 28.

The blushing rose exhales a sweetness round,
Then, drooping fast, falls scentless to the ground;
The violet, nurtured by the genial rays
Of opening Spring, expands, and soon decays;
The fragrant lily too, howe'er it glow
With beauty, sinks as does the fallen snow;
So lovely youth, frail as the transient flower,
Must quickly yield to Death's relentless power.

a spirited "Introduction" to my volume. Had the book "come before the world either without any introduction, or (with) one different from that which occupies its first thirty pages," he might have displayed less formidable anger, and I, with his consent, have passed unscathed. "Ay, there's the rub:" that Introduction will surely break his heart, and haply some besides. And yet 'tis "strange," 'tis "passing strange," that the composition which he pronounces to be of such feeble import that a child might have conceived it, should have thrown into a paroxysm of rage two doughty champions of Wordsworth's muse! Unfortunately for our local critic, he lacks every requisite of his art. The freedom with which he misquotes an author, his bad grammar, imperfect reading, and unaccountable ignorance of the simplest truths in Nature, disqualify him to rank with even

> "The bookful blockhead ignorantly read,
> With loads of learned lumber in his head."

And in trespassing on a delicate province more rudely than his exemplar of the "Morning Post," he extorts the declaration that

> "fools rush in where angels fear to tread."

Aware, most likely, that the stanzas written by Wordsworth on the death of Lucy, which I have elsewhere adduced, as affording but a questionable proof of tenderness, have been held by some journalists to constitute an exquisite little poem, he insists on their superiority to some verses of my own. I have never had the vanity to contend with the Laureate for the

palm: without troubling myself, therefore, about the comparison, I shall proceed to show in what the meanness of this piece consists.

> "She dwelt among the untrodden ways
> Beside the springs of Dove,
> A Maid whom there were none to praise
> And very few to love."

An inelegance, almost exclusively confined to writers of the Lake school, as seen in the employment of a noun together with its correspondent pronoun, disfigures this stanza. The bad taste implied in its adoption will be the more obvious on a transposition of the words. A maid *she* dwelt among the untrodden ways. It may be urged that our authorized version of the Bible sanctions the usage I condemn. So it does: but it is equally true that a modern version would not be suffered to perpetuate the fault. A man of education is rarely, *if ever*, heard to offend the ear by the use of this pleonasm; and a schoolboy, who should construct a stanza after such fashion, would most assuredly expose himself to the ridicule of his class-fellows, and the reproof of his master. Admiration of the fair sex is the common precursor of love; and those whom we admire we are wont to praise. Then is there no self-contradiction involved in *the Poet's* assertion that, though impliedly *loved*, there was *none to praise his Lucy?*

> "A violet by a mossy stone
> Half hidden from the eye!
> Fair as a star, when only one
> Is shining in the sky."

I know not how *the Poet* could have selected a better emblem of Lucy's beauty, modesty, sweetness, and seclusion, than was to be found in the simple violet. But in making this admission, I take it for granted that he designed the flower to represent her charms. No comparison is instituted; hence the reader is left to provide for an awkward ellipsis, as his ingenuity shall best enable him, because it would seem that the writer knew not how to give full and perfect expression to his own thoughts. If, instead of crippling himself in this manner upon the two first lines, he had taken the entire stanza through which to convey his meaning, he might have acquitted himself better: but dissatisfied, apparently, with the flower as a type of Lucy's worth, he would fain have likened her to a star that blazes in the firmament, to be seen of all men. How could these two objects, having no attributes in common, be made alike illustrative of the maiden?

> "She lived unknown, and few could know
> When Lucy ceased to be;
> But she is in her grave, and, oh,
> The difference to me!"

The Poet now recurs to Lucy's unobtrusive simplicity, which happens to be directly at variance with the personal attractiveness implied in her resemblance to a star; and then announcing her death, he leaves us to infer in what degree he bewailed her loss, by saying that it made a "difference" to him. It is but charitable to suppose that the "difference" was felt in a diminution of his worldly happiness; yet it is

difficult to imagine that the man, who had confessedly no praise to bestow on Lucy during her life, would suffer much anguish at her death.

This analysis of what is said to express "the deep but subdued and *silent* fervour" of *the Poet* may, peradventure, be somewhat distasteful to my reviewer in the "Guardian," and other lovers of the bathos: and it is to be feared that I shall not atone for my transgression by contending that the town in which I live, though by no means distinguished for its literature, is crowded with youth of both sexes that could do greater honour to Lucy's memory than was conferred upon it by Wordsworth.

The critic's pitiful remarks on "My love and I together grew" shall be disposed of in few words. I can easily believe a man, mean enough to make a pretended critique the vehicle of personal insult, to be a stranger to the use of endearing epithets: I can believe such man to be scantily endowed with sense as with moral principle: but I cannot believe him to be *so ignorant* as not to know that the term "My love," in this instance, applies to the *object* of regard. This being understood, all his tortuous cavillings serve but to disclose the wickedness of his purpose.

After a little further vapouring, my reviewer observes "it is with Mr. Wright, *not with Mr. Wordsworth*, that we have now to deal:" then, by an amusing stroke of practical negation, he presents to my notice a few of the Laureate's stanzas, and asks what I have to say of them. Irrelevant as is their consideration to my own defence, I will bestow upon them a passing comment.

"There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore; —
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more."

It would be unjust to deny that the former part of this stanza well expresses the sentiments of all who look back upon that sunny period of life when, at the sight of every new object, the heart leaped for joy: and I presume it was *the Poet's* intention to say that now having attained to manhood, Nature wears not so divine an aspect as she then did. Literally interpreted, however, he is in the predicament of Milton — insensible to those inviting scenes that wait on vision. Nor is it possible to force any other meaning upon the passage, by a gratuitous assumption of tropes and figures.

"Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The *things* which I have seen I now can see no more"

is a plain unqualified attestation of a fact which, having not its basis in truth, can find no countenance in the false guise of poetry.

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home."

The characteristic idiosyncrasy of *the Poet* is well illustrated in this stanza.

"Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:"

who, besides Wordsworth, would have written *that?* Whatever he might have wished to express, it is certain that the doctrine of transmigration is here boldly propounded! "The soul that *rises* with us — hath had elsewhere its *setting*, and cometh from afar," unconscious of its former association, as implied in the "sleep" and "forgetting" with which "birth" is identified. But now wishing to qualify the sense, as was his custom, he tells us that the soul comes "not in *entire forgetfulness*, and not in utter nakedness;" and we are thus to suppose that on quitting the body in which it formerly dwelt, it receives a commission to inhabit another, and comes "trailing clouds of glory—from God, who is our home." Nor is it unreasonable to conclude that, as my reviewer in the "Guardian" refers me to the passage with much exultation, it involves an hypothesis to which he cordially subscribes. And having enjoyed the benefit of *the Poet's* philosophy of birth, it would be unfair to deny him the solace afforded by the same authority in the event of death:

"Sleep
Doth, in my estimate of good, appear
A better state than waking; death than sleep:
Feelingly sweet is stillness after storm,
Though under covert of the wormy ground!"

Almost as certainly as that light is refracted in its transmission through an earthly medium, did truth

suffer obscurity in encountering Wordsworth's mind: such indeed was his intellectual perversion, that he could scarcely avail himself of information, come whence it might, without adulterating it with some adventitious weakness of his own. Limited to the sphere of the nursery, where

"ten low words oft creep in one dull line,"

no harm resulted from this infirmity. But he grew inflated, — took higher ground, — and speculating confidently, in proportion as he departed from current opinion did he commonly lapse into error.

Having thus far endeavoured to edify my reviewer with a criticism on the verse of which he boasts, I shall hasten to meet the objections he offers to my poem on "the Thrush." By an unfortunate obliquity of thought to which impertinence is liable, he proposes to compare it with one on a like subject from the pen of Wordsworth, and then complacently introduces "the reverie of poor Susan," in which the bird has neither part nor lot, except that it reminded Susan of the home of her childhood. A little further search amongst the Laureate's pastorals might have rewarded him with a discovery of several thrushes, engaged in concert with other birds, to whose united sweetness my own "Thrush" must have deferred. And as it would be ungenerous to take advantage of his omission in this instance, I shall do what he has left undone.

"The sun has long been set,
The stars are out by twos and threes,
The little birds are piping yet
Among the bushes and trees;

There's a cuckoo, and one or two thrushes,
And a far off wind that rushes,
And a sound of water that gushes,
And the cuckoo's sovereign cry
Fills all the hollow of the sky.
Who would 'go parading'
In London, 'and masquerading,'
On such a night of June
With that beautiful soft half-moon,
And all these innocent blisses?
On such a night as this is!"

To those who, like *the Poet*, shall have been privileged to hear the thrush, the cuckoo, and other diurnal songsters, *long after sunset*, when the stars have been out "by twos and threes," this effort to commemorate, in imperishable song, an event of such rare occurrence, will, I doubt not, be highly acceptable.

Since the critic has been pleased to assure me that his animadversions were dictated "in no unkind spirit," I can conceive it *possible* that he might have quoted the five stanzas, of which my poem "to the Thrush" consists, if, as he ingenuously intimates, he could have found space for more than three. Being provided with that which to him was a desideratum, and being moreover on good terms with the entire piece, I shall submit it to the reader's attention, before dealing with the clamour that has been raised against it.

TO THE THRUSH.

Herald of Spring! thy quickening call
To unawakened joy inspires

The listless grove, the fields, * *and all*
Inherent hope, with fond desires;
While storms, arrested by thy spell,
Shrink back in frozen wilds to dwell.

The Genii of the woods revere
Thee as the soul of fabled Pan,
Enlivening with thy strains the ear
Of *generous and untutored man;*
And, smiling in their woodland flowers,
They lure thee to their sylvan bowers.

Lavish of song, thy music fills
The distant plain with varied mirth,
That wakes the voice of echoing hills,
Till all the teeming face of earth,
Responsive to thy vocal sweets,
The story of thy love repeats.

The shade of heathen Druid holds
Communion with thy sprightly race,
In mystic language *that unfolds*
Its virtue in the pleasing grace
Of mistletoe, dispensing charms
To Britons with extended arms!

Pomona, with indulgent hand,
Invites thee to her rich domain;
Yea, cultured and uncultured land
Attest thy undisputed reign;
While admiration seals the tongue
When listening to thy welcome song!

* The words in italics are now printed to correspond with the reviewer's type.

There is an old proverb that a work well begun is half accomplished, *dimidium facti, qui cœpit, habet,* to which it would appear, in the estimation of my reviewer, I have paid little heed; for he charges me with having introduced "the Thrush" in a false character, inasmuch as I have allowed him to "usurp the office usually assigned to the swallow and cuckoo." That this man can neither have read a creditable authority in Natural History, nor have observed the habits of the feathered race, I will engage to prove. The Missel Thrush is a bird of vigorous habit, whose notes may be occasionally heard at Christmas, — *often* in January; and in the following month he is pretty nearly in full song. Let but a gleam of sunshine now appear, and from the top of an apple tree, an oak, or a poplar, while other birds are mute, he will greet the approaching Spring in a strain that seems to animate all Nature. Nay, he will even combat the wind and rain in his mirth; so that "the name of Stormcock is a well known appellation for the Missel Thrush."* While thus anticipating every other bird in song, where are the migratory swallow and cuckoo? They reach not our shores until about the middle of April, when, according to a somewhat prevalent notion, Spring has already commenced her genial reign. Concurrently with this seasonable accession of sprightliness in the Thrush, is witnessed a like impatience of restraint in the vegetable kingdom. The vital principle, which has previously been latent, discovers itself in a visible series of reproductive operations, as in the instance of sentient life. And since the Thrush stands alone in ministering to ex-

* Yarrell.

pectancy, I cannot have exceeded the licence of poetry in the first stanza addressed to him:

> Herald of Spring! thy quickening call
> To unawakened joy inspires
> The listless grove, the fields, and all
> Inherent hope, with fond desires;
> While storms, arrested by thy spell,
> Shrink back in frozen wilds to dwell.

Another difficulty occurs to the critic in the next stanza; for not being "well up" in the learning of the schools, he cannot discover the appropriateness of my allusion to the Egyptian deity. He who has listened to the varied notes of the Missel Thrush will hardly have failed to mark how closely some of them resemble those of the Pan-pipe or mouth organ. And the bird, like the fabled god, being for the most part a resident of wood and grove, the faculty of association readily accorded to it the spirit of this deity. Pan, moreover, having been esteemed the god of shepherds, I could be at no loss to conceive the applicability of the songster to the enjoyment of such as are engaged in pastoral husbandry. Does the reviewer object to my recognition of the farmer as a "generous and untutored man"? Why, the simplicity with which he suffers himself to be deluded by the "Nottinghamshire Guardian" into a belief that the Legislature will re-impose a corn law, for the benefit of landlords and their tenantry, at the cost of the manufacturing and commercial interests, is the best authority I can plead in justification of the expression. But while ascribing to the farmer a generosity which greatly enhances his claim to sympathy at a

period of agricultural depression almost without precedent, I will do him the further justice to assert that he is too well acquainted with his vernacular tongue to insist, as does my reviewer, that "woodland" and "sylvan" are correlative terms. Woodland, in its most correct sense, means land occupied by wood; and "woodland flowers" are such as grow upon its surface, and which, in the primitive phraseology of Wordsworth, would be called "ground-flowers." Sylvan, on the contrary, has immediate reference to that which constitutes the wood. By a sylvan bower, then, is implied a retreat of some altitude, in which the Thrush is found as well to sing as to build its nest: thus the necessary distinction between these epithets, at which the reviewer sneers, is duly preserved in the couplet that closes the second stanza. Passing by the third, he encounters an inexplicable difficulty at the fourth stanza, where the Thrush, Druidic shades, and mistletoe seem, in his bewilderment, to dance before him 'in all the mazes of metaphorical confusion.' For his comfort I would remark that the Druids "deemed the mistletoe sacred, if it vegetated from the oak. They selected groves of oaks, and thought every thing sent from heaven which grew on this tree. On the sixth day of the moon, which was the beginning of their months and years, and of their period of thirty years, they came to the oak on which they observed any of the parasitical plant (which they called all-healing), prepared a sacrifice and a feast under this venerated tree, and brought thither two white bulls, whose horns were then first tied. The officiating Druid, in a white garment, climbed the tree, and, with a golden knife," or, according to

Stukeley, a brass hatchet, "pruned off the mistletoe, which was received in a white woollen cloth below. They then sacrificed the victims, and addressed their gods to make the mistletoe prosperous to those to whom it was given; for they believed that it caused fecundity, and was an amulet against poison."* Almost the sole agent in the perpetuation of this parasite is the Missel Thrush, which greedily devours its berries. In doing so, it not unfrequently happens that some portion of the seed, by means of the viscid pulp in which it is embedded, adheres to the exterior of the beak, and, on being rubbed by the bird upon a branch on which it subsequently alights, clings in like manner to the bark, and in due time germinates. Profiting by this curious fact, the naturalist has often tried to propagate the mistletoe; and though success may have occasionally rewarded him, he has much more commonly failed. Such is the testimony of Abercrombie; and to his I may add my own, having made the experiment in a vast many instances with uniform failure. Of all this my reviewer can have known nothing. Convicted then as he now stands of ignorance that, but for the pains I have taken with him, might have been thought incredible on a subject of popular interest, he might well exclaim "of the lines we have italicized we must acknowledge that the meaning lies too deep for our comprehension." Assisted, however, by the information I have vouchsafed him, supported as it is by the eagerness with which, as a nation, we yet search for mistletoe in the furtherance of our Christmas convivialities, it is *possible he may*

* Sharon Turner's History of the Anglo-Saxons.

learn that, in the figurative language of the following stanza, is conveyed much that a man of better education would have known how to appreciate:

> The shade of heathen Druid holds
> Communion with thy sprightly race,
> In mystic language that unfolds
> Its virtue in the pleasing grace
> Of mistletoe, dispensing charms
> To Britons with extended arms!

When first proposing to include the "Imprecation" among other pieces that occupy a place in my volume, I doubted the propriety of doing so; but my scruples were soon dissipated on reading "The Sisters" by the present Laureate, who may fairly be said to represent the caudal extremity of the Lake school. Not wishing to injure the moral susceptibility of my reviewer beyond the demands of necessity, I must implore him, on my introduction of "The Sisters," to bear up against the infliction as best he can. It is hard work for a man who is confessedly shocked at the resentment of an unprovoked outrage, to be dragged through a scene of seduction, damnation, treachery, and murder; but he will surely console himself with the reflection that it proceeds from the pen of one, whose boast it is to have received the laurel "from the brows of him that uttered nothing base."

THE SISTERS.

BY ALFRED TENNYSON.

> We were two daughters of one race:
> She was the fairest in the face:
> The wind is blowing in turret and tree.

They were together, and she fell;
Therefore revenge became me well.
O the Earl was fair to see!

She died: she went to burning flame:
She mixed her ancient blood with shame.
The wind is howling in turret and tree.
Whole weeks and months, and early and late,
To win his love I lay in wait:
O the Earl was fair to see!

I made a feast; I bad him come;
I won his love, I brought him home.
The wind is roaring in turret and tree.
And after supper, on a bed,
Upon my lap he laid his head:
O the Earl was fair to see!

I kissed his eyelids into rest:
His ruddy cheek upon my breast.
The wind is raging in turret and tree.
I hated him with the hate of hell,
But I loved his beauty passing well.
O the Earl was fair to see!

I rose up in the silent night:
I made my dagger sharp and bright.
The wind is raving in turret and tree.
As half-asleep his breath he drew,
Three times I stabbed him thro' and thro'.
O the Earl was fair to see!

I curled and combed his comely head,
He looked so grand when he was dead.
The wind is blowing in turret and tree.
I wrapt his body in the sheet,
And laid him at his mother's feet.
O the Earl was fair to see!

In taking leave of the literary charlatan, whose impositions find currency through the "Nottinghamshire Guardian," I will just add that, if amongst the fraternity to which he belongs men of better parts are to be found, there are none more adroit in the use of petty artifice than he is. From the novel device by which, with the aid of diamond type on one hand, and stalwart Roman on the other, he succeeds in contrasting authors, down to the marshalling of a group of notes of exclamation, after the manner of a line of infantry, he is distinguished from the ruffians of the "Morning Post" and "Tait," who, confiding in the resources of unabashed impudence, deal *only* in scurrility. At the hands of the journalists I well knew, as already intimated, that in the publication of my volume I could expect no sympathy; for though most of them had, in years that are gone by, treated Wordsworth more contemptuously than I have done, his appointment to the rank of Laureate tended greatly to conciliate them. So little did *the Poet* write from the date of his elevation to his demise in 1850, that they had few opportunities for eulogizing him until the appearance of his "*Prelude*," which, by way of showing with what good taste his "*Prefaces*" had been attached to the conclusion of his works, was directed to be published at the close of his life. But the announcement of his memoirs was the key-note to posthumous praise, that has swelled almost into a national chorus; and my own strictures on his versification following immediately upon this performance, the critics, to be true to themselves, must necessarily complain of me. To that I could make no valid objection: having in-

sisted on my own right of individual judgment when estimating the worth of another, I ought not, on frivolous ground, to impeach the reviewer. Nor do I: it is against the abuse of his prerogative that I protest. Had my unjust judges taken for their guidance this law — "with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again," I should have been satisfied with their decision. In my analysis of Wordsworth's character as a Poet, I quoted many passages from his works as illustrative of my argument; and contended that a reference to long, entire, and much admired pieces would no less warrant the conclusions to which I had arrived. To have justified their condemnation of me they were bound to disprove my authority; but dreading a task so much beyond their capacity, they have madly assailed me with unqualified invective. Dismayed in nowise by such treatment, and strong in the conviction that if writers of Wordsworth's class are still to enjoy the distinguished recognition of the State, England will be doomed to chronicle her literary decline from the reign of Victoria, I persist in disputing the title of such men to intellectual supremacy. But while thus firm and unshaken in my purpose, it cannot be supposed that I shall stoop to a warfare with every foul adversary that may propose to enter the lists with me; nor can it be expected that I shall further notice the assumptions of one who, bringing neither talents nor acquirements above those of mediocrity to the contest, is a stranger to the courtesy that adorns the character of an English gentleman.

FURTHER OBSERVATIONS

IN

JUSTIFICATION OF THE AUTHOR'S STRICTURES.

"Oh! many are the Poets that are sown
By Nature; men endowed with highest gifts,
The vision and the faculty divine;
Yet wanting the accomplishment of verse,
(Which, in the docile season of their youth,
It was denied them to acquire, through lack
Of culture and the inspiring aid of books,
Or haply by a temper too severe,
[Or a nice backwardness afraid of shame)
Nor having e'er, as life advanced, been led
By circumstance to take unto the height
The measure of themselves, these favoured Beings,
All but a scattered few, live out their time,
Husbanding that which they possess within,
And go to the grave unthought of."

Thus wrote Wordsworth! and it would seem to be a source of no little concern to his admirers that, as one of the "scattered few," Nature should have assigned to me the task of vindicating her laws against the misrepresentations of an assumed authority, instead of suffering me to "go to the grave, unthought of." Not the least of the difficulties that occurred to me, in the execution

of this task, was the selecting of passages that could be fairly said to present a claim to critical notice. Page after page would betray such barrenness of thought and imagery, that as well might I have explored the mountain stream in search of pearls, as have pursued the verse for a phrase worthy of comment. So vague are *the Poet's* descriptions of Nature, and so absurd are his inductions, that he might have said, with one of the shepherds in Shakspeare's comedy*, of philosophy, "I know the more one sickens, the worse at ease he is; and that he that wants money, means, and content, is without three good friends; that the property of rain is to wet, and fire to burn, that good pasture makes fat sheep, and that a great cause of the night, is lack of the sun; that he, that hath learned no wit by nature nor art, may complain of good breeding, or comes of a very dull kindred."

It is worthy of remark, in this stage of the discussion, as illustrative of the weakness of those reviewers who have expressed the bitterest hostility towards me, that whilst none of them have attempted to disturb the argument in which I disputed the late Laureate's pretensions to a place amongst our national poets, all have complained of the ground on which my argument was based. Feeling assured that to deny me the necessary premises would be to negative all logical inference, they would fain have sealed the works of this feeble writer to my view. Nor have they been less unscrupulous in impugning the motive that impelled me to the work. The reviewer in "Fraser," after imploring his readers to laugh

* As you Like it.

heartily at the entertainment he sought to provide for them at my expense, in terms which nevertheless indicated that he himself was writhing in agony the while, observed that "the only possible explanation" he could find for what I had done, was that of "some personal spite." Then, in a tone of *poetic* indignation, he wondered that a man could "proclaim at this time of day," that 'not the least objectionable feature in the Laureate's character as a poet, was his love of intercourse with plebeians of the lowest grade, as Betty Foy and Susan Gale, Goody Blake and Harry Gill, Alice Fell, Peter Bell, and others equally vulgar,' "without a dread lest the very sparrows on the house-top *should mob him*, and the flies on the window-pane *join audibly in the horse-laugh of an astonished universe!*" In the absence of such retribution, the reviewer exclaims, "Oh for a stone-bow to hit him in the eye!" "Let him be hanged on the gallows which he set up for another." But the raving of this man ends not here: for intent on the perpetration of the greatest possible injustice, and having not the intellectual power required to invest a wicked design with the semblance of virtuous dealing, he says, "the most exquisite jest is, that these parodies and caricatures of Wordsworth and Shelley are *the only poems in the book in which there is any gleam of shrewdness or power*, as if he had been raised for the time, though against his will, by intercourse with the very genuises he insulted, and *actually wrote better than himself, when he intended to be writing worse!*" Then, in the following page, imagining that a construction the reverse of this would prove most damnatory, and forgetting all he had previously written, the blockhead asserts that "the

most deliciously absurd part of the matter is, that the pages of white paper, which he has spoilt with rhymes, which are intended to be parodies of Wordsworth and Shelley, are yet *so exactly like the seriously-written stuff which he wishes the public to admire, that we can hardly ever tell when he is in jest or earnest.*" And this man is one of the literary staff engaged on Fraser's Magazine —a journal professedly devoted to the interests of English literature, and pleading, in common with every periodical of like character, the independent principles on which it is conducted. Can any one of reflection doubt that, for a still heavier bribe, the hireling, whose turpitude I have unmasked, would have been slow to inflict on me an outrage akin to that which too often darkens the moral atmosphere of Ireland? The mind that can wallow in its own pollution, in the hope of sullying the reputation of another, may, by an easy convertibility, be made subordinate to the basest purposes of mankind. A friend, addressing me soon after the appearance of the number from which the above extracts were taken, observed, in the simplicity of his heart, that he yet expected to see my volume treated with impartiality and candour. Impartiality and candour! how little knew my friend of the policy of journalism! A literary periodical is always conducted by a party of clever, enterprising men, who, by virtue of capital invested therein, or immediate remuneration, proportioned to the supposed value of their several contributions, are necessarily interested in the success of the undertaking. The united labour of these men represents the staple character of the work. Each of them, again, has a literary connection, from which paid

auxiliaries are chosen, to laud or abuse, at the bidding of the prime movers. Gratuitous communications also reach them, as well from men of established repute, as from aspirants for intellectual distinction. If the papers from this last source be approved, and the writers be unknown, they are commonly invited to an interview with one or more of the principals, when their services are acknowledged in a manner alike honourable to both parties. Thus the immediate interest of a popular journal is seen to ramify through various grades and conditions of society. And the bond of union that forms so marked a feature in the constitution of political parties, holds no less amongst men professedly literary. Should any one included in this category venture to publish an independent work, he may always, irrespective of its merit, depend on the support of the journal to which he is known. But if, on the other hand, a man presume to publish without such previous inauguration, and be, moreover, unrepresented by an active official where he needs countenance, he may expect to receive a cursory notice, or that form of encomium which the ingenuity of the reviewer shall not fail in due time to neutralize. This is to suppose that he has no personal enemy connected with the periodical, and that his views in nowise clash with those of an author immediately or remotely allied to it: for in either case, though he should have written with the power and truthfulness of Channing, when delineating the character of Napoleon Buonaparte, his style will be charged with weakness, and every other fault from which it claims exemption. Like the profligate, who counts his chances of success by the rate at which he shall boast of his

honour, these pseudo-conservatives of English literature rely upon their vaunted independence for a profitable career, in the face of popular ignorance. During the earlier history of journalism, it was otherwise. Education was then limited to the wealthy. None but scholars read the reviews; and none but men of high endowments could find employment on them. Our magazines were valuable repertories of learning and science; and, fortunately for such interests, some of them are still in healthful activity. But since education has become a *sine qua non* with all classes, these instruments have proportionably multiplied; and the periodicals of the day are more generally read by members of Mechanics' Institutes than by those of the learned professions. Yet how truly soever these readers may adorn the sphere in which they respectively move, they are least of all qualified to distinguish between genuine and spurious criticism: hence the proprietors of our public journals, with characteristic sagacity, entrust their management to men of quick parts, who, though combining but a slender stock of acquirements with lofty pretensions, are sufficiently acquainted with the failings of society to give effect to their service.

Hastening now to the more immediate consideration of my subject, it will be seen that, in spite of Wordsworth's early connection with Southey and Coleridge, *writing as never man did before,* he could find no place amongst the serials of the day; and, for the same reason, his labours were made the sport of all the reviewers. Time, however, witnesses great changes in the fortunes of mankind. Whilst brighter men scoffed at his rhymes, the private munificence of the wealthy enriched

his store, places and pensions followed, together with a corresponding amount of influence; and the very journals that had unmercifully castigated him became most vehement in his praise. One instance will I adduce by way of illustration. A writer in the "Monthly Review" for February, 1819, in a critique on Coleridge's "Biographia Literaria," observes, "If it be thought that we have already dwelt too much on his (Wordsworth's) follies, be it remembered that he is the very founder and father of that modern school, which we have always wished to see held up to the general ridicule that it deserves; and if it be not thus overpowered, woe to the taste, judgment, and whole understanding of the rising generation!" In the same journal for August, 1835, his reviewer says, "We know of no canon of criticism by which the next few lines can be suitably tried; but they seem to us spotless." Curiosity will doubtless be excited to learn what these "few lines" are: I will therefore transcribe them; and if, like the reviewer, I "know of no canon of criticism by which" their worth can be estimated, I will draw upon the resources of common sense.

"If this great world of joy and pain
Revolve in one sure track;
If freedom, set, will rise again,
And virtue, flown, come back;
Woe to the purblind crew who fill
The heart with each day's care;
Nor gain, from past or future, skill
To bear, and to forbear!"

Of poetry, in its correct acceptation, there is none in these lines. They consist of prose, metrically arranged, but which, according to Wordsworth's theory, should be

held to constitute poetry. The stanza involves two propositions, — the first of which, embracing three clauses, we are required to admit, in order to justify the application of the second. All will concur in the belief that this world will "revolve in one sure track," whether the phrase refer to the revolutions of the earth in the solar system, or to the prevalence of "joy and pain" amongst those who inhabit its surface. But we are called upon to attach implicit faith as well to the supposition that, though "set," freedom "will rise again," and, though lost, "virtue" will be recovered. Few, who are conversant with history, or the deceitfulness of the human heart, will be inclined to make this admission. For the sake of argument, however, I will grant it. Then follows the second proposition:

> "Woe to the purblind crew who fill
> The heart with each day's care;
> Nor gain, from past or future, skill
> To bear, and to forbear!"

So, because we conceive that the yoke of tyranny under which we may be groaning, will, soon or late, by some fortuitous train of circumstances, or the special interposition of Providence, be removed, we are to bear it with uncomplaining submission. Why, then, are the sympathies of England painfully exercised at this moment, on behalf of oppressed France? Opposed to the general sense of mankind, *the Poet* must have contemplated, with feelings of the utmost complacency, the character of the clown who, when his vehicle stuck fast in the mire, called upon Hercules to help him, instead of placing his shoulder to the wheel, in the hope of ex-

tricating it. So, again, because we are told that "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it;" the ministers of our holy religion are to look with silent unconcern upon the vices of the age, and idly imagine that "virtue" in due time will regain her ascendency. And those who "fill the heart with each day's care," under these afflicting circumstances, are designated a "purblind crew." Can any precept be conceived more entirely at variance with the dictates of a sound mind? Yet the critic impudently asserts that the lines which embody it are "spotless." But what must be the reader's estimate of this man's fitness for the trust confided to him, when, with no better quality of verse before him than this, he proceeds to say that "with all his (Wordsworth's) conscious power over language, and surcharged as it is with an *unction that appears awful as sublime revelations embody, it yet is too gross for his majestic knowledge, wisdom, and heaven-born benevolence!*" That medium, through which Moses and the Prophets fulfilled the commands of Heaven, and through which David exulted in deathless song,—that medium, through which the Redeemer of the world proclaimed his divine mission, was "*too gross for Wordsworth's majestic knowledge, wisdom, and heaven-born benevolence!*" It can hardly excite surprise to add, that he, who could thus barter the truth for secular considerations, also declared that when *the Poet* "does in his ripened and august simplicity condescend to speak to us of what he feels and has enjoyed, his pictures and teachings are as plain and perfect as the most exact stickler for truthful representations can desire." In how far the late Laureate's

merit entitles him to this eulogy, it will be the object of my present inquiry to determine.

With little of the boyish ardour that commonly bespeaks genius, the incidents occurring to Wordsworth in early life were neither many nor striking. At school he failed to distinguish himself beyond others of his age; and at college he disappointed the expectations of his friends. The study of classic literature he therefore gladly relinquished for the more agreeable exercise of English versification. This, however, was but to forego one difficulty for another. The creative faculty he had not; and his imagination was of doubtful character. Spenser, Shakspeare, and Milton, were unapproachable to him; and to rival his contemporaries, in the true province of poetry, was to undertake a harder task than that of contending with modern schoolmen. What was to be done? He would institute a new poetical code, adapted to his own capacity, and urge its claims, by precept and example, on the consideration of his countrymen. He was master of rhyme; and basing his scheme on simplicity of thought and expression, he conceived that he might, "by fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of" what he called "the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation," impart to his verse that charm which it is the poet's study to convey. "The Sparrow's Nest" may conveniently serve to illustrate his theory: and I prefer its insertion to any other of his earlier composition, because the author afterwards said of it —

> "And in this bush our sparrow built her nest,
> Of which I sang one song that will not die."

THE SPARROW'S NEST.

"Behold, within the leafy shade,
Those bright blue eggs together laid!
On me the chance-discovered sight
Gleamed like a vision of delight.
I started — seeming to espy
The home and sheltered bed,
The Sparrow's dwelling, which, hard by
My father's house, in wet or dry
My sister Emmeline and I
Together visited."

"She looked at it and seemed to fear it;
Dreading, tho' wishing, to be near it:
Such heart was in her, being then
A little Prattler among men.
The Blessing of my later years
Was with me when a boy:
She gave me eyes, she gave me ears;
And humble cares, and delicate fears;
A heart, the fountain of sweet tears;
And love, and thought, and joy."

Whatever might be *the Poet's* seeming confidence in the dogma he sought to establish, it is difficult to suppose that he could review these stanzas, without entertaining many secret misgivings in the success of his labour. For whilst, by common consent, an ornamental phraseology is allowed to be the most appropriate vehicle for the imagination to revel in, he contended, with singular waywardness, that the language of ordinary life, *metrically arranged*, should constitute the *grand distinction of poetry*, because such language must, in some degree, be made available to

the Poet's use: and so repudiating, on principle, the loftiness of diction which, in every age, has been held to embody the very soul of poetry, like the bird, divested of its plumage, he necessarily became a groundling! Conscious of his dilemma, he says those "who have been accustomed to the gaudiness" of other writers, "will look round for poetry, and will be induced to inquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to assume that title;" and thinking to conciliate his readers, he further observes that "the human mind is capable of being excited without the application of gross and violent stimulants; and he must have a very faint perception of its beauty and dignity who does not know this, and who does not further know, that one being is elevated above another, in proportion as he possesses this capability. It has therefore appeared to me, that to endeavour to produce or enlarge this capability is one of the best services in which, at any period, a writer can be engaged." Directed to almost any other purpose, these remarks would be well timed; but since poetry addresses itself no less to the passions than to the understanding, they are wholly inapplicable to the subject in question. Nor can their author have wondered at the inflictions with which he was visited on every hand. His theory involved a fundamental error, by which he was restricted to the use of language least of all adapted to his art. And as words are the symbols of thought, it was impossible for him to shine. As well might he have attempted to execute some delicate piece of mechanism without the necessary appliances, as to excel in song, when denying to himself those resources to which all

other writers had access. Tropes, metaphors, and similes, he stripped of their native guise, and sent forth bald and perishable as the leafless bay. Thus his profitable exercise of the twofold sense of seeing and hearing, acquired by intercourse with an amiable sister, is acknowledged in metaphorical nakedness that few would be disposed to imitate:

" She gave me eyes, she gave me ears."

Taking " the Sparrow's Nest " as a model of Wordsworth's style, is it calculated to inspire the reader with respect for his principles? Allowing his " selection of the language really spoken by men," in this instance, to have been " made with true taste and feeling," does the result justify an assurance that such selection " will of itself form a distinction far greater than would at first be imagined, and will entirely separate the composition from the vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life? " If colloquial usage in the author's neighbourhood sanctioned a phraseology meaner than this, the people around him could hardly have been redeemed from barbarism. Bold as the conclusion may appear, I can attain to no other belief than that the revolution which the late Laureate sought to effect in our national poetry, was the work of necessity, and not of choice. To suppose a man, qualified to write in a strain universally understood to be significant of the highest genius, voluntarily sacrificing himself at the shrine of puerility, is to violate the common instincts of our nature. His verse, moreover, abounds with internal evidence of a cramped, undisciplined mind, feast-

ing on imaginary greatness: for whilst he maintained that "if the poet's subject be judiciously chosen, it will naturally, and upon fit occasion, lead him to passions the language of which, if selected truly and judiciously, must necessarily be dignified and variegated, and alive with metaphors and figures," I look in vain to his poetry for happy illustrations. Are they discoverable in "Peter Bell," on which twenty years' revision was bestowed? Neither in its general scope, nor in detail, is the poem entitled to commendation; and even had it been, for the most part, well written, the stanza succeeding that in which the hero is said to have tried by artifice "to ease his conscience" would have thrown discredit on the whole.

> "By this his heart is lighter far;
> And, finding that he can account
> So snugly for that crimson stain,
> His evil spirit up again
> *Does like an empty bucket mount.*"

Yet, that *the Poet* thought "Peter Bell" an invaluable production, will be seen in the following sonnet:

> "A book came forth of late, called "Peter Bell;"
> Not negligent the style; — the matter? good
> As aught that song records of Robin Hood;
> Or Roy, renowned through many a Scottish dell;
> But some (who brook those hackneyed themes full well,
> Nor heat, at Tam O'Shanter's name, their blood)
> Waxed wroth, and with foul claws, a harpy brood,
> On bard and hero clamorously fell.

Heed not, wild Rover once through heath and glen,
Who mad'st at length the better life thy choice,
Heed not such onset! nay, if praise of men
To thee appear not an unmeaning voice,
Lift up that grey-haired forehead, and rejoice
In the just tribute of thy Poet's pen!"

The discrepancy in Wordsworth's theory and practice to which reference has just been made, discovers but one of the many aspects in which his incongruity of thought manifests itself. On the general execution of his work, he says, "I have at all times endeavoured to look steadily at my subject; consequently, there is, I hope, in these Poems little falsehood of description, and my ideas are expressed in language fitted to their respective importance. Something must have been gained by this practice, as it is friendly to one property of all good poetry, namely, good sense." And the sentiment is exultingly echoed by the writer in the "Monthly Review," whom I have already quoted. Now, in the Introduction to my own volume, it was alleged that the late Laureate betrayed a want of that faculty from which the purest inspiration flows, *i. e. feeling;* and thence was deduced the laxity of observation, and unprofitable suggestion, to which his writings testify. Yet it so happens that he believed himself to possess these qualities in a preeminent degree, as do also his admirers. Nor will it avail me with the latter to protest that a confession he made in the outset of his career must have often recurred to him in subsequent life:

"In honest truth,
I looked for something that I could not find,
Affecting more emotion than I felt."

They will resist conviction: and as the faculties of observation and reflection in a poet are more allowably debatable than is his sensibility, I shall proceed to substantiate the correctness of my own judgment, by reference to his verse.

"Up the brook
I roamed in the confusion of my heart,
Alive to all things and forgetting all.
At length I to a sudden turning came
In this continuous glen, where down a rock
The stream, so ardent in its course before,
Sent forth such sallies of glad sound, that all
Which I till then had heard, appeared the voice
Of common pleasure: beast and bird, the lamb,
The shepherd's dog, the linnet and the thrush
Vied with this waterfall, and made a song,
Which, while I listened, *seemed like the wild growth*
Or like some natural produce of the air,
That could not cease to be."

The lines are taken from *the Poet's* description of a walk he enjoyed on "an April morning," beside a rivulent that "*ran with a young man's speed;*" and they not unaptly portray the "happy idleness" in which he was accustomed to indulge. "Alive to all things and forgetting all," he pursues his desultory course until the stream "sent forth such sallies of glad sound," as to excite the emulation of "the lamb, the shepherd's dog, the linnet, and the thrush." This is well said: but now appears the weakness so characteristic of our author. What does this harmony suggest? It

"seemed like the wild growth
Or like some natural produce of the air,
That could not cease to be."

A few brief hours would find the shepherd and his trusty dog contentedly asleep, — the beast reposing in its lair, — and the bird embowered at rest. Yet a little while, and no longer fired by vernal impulse, the scene altogether changes. How, then, could the transient pleasure have been associated, in a healthy mind, with that which "could not cease to be?" If "good sense" be a necessary constituent of "good poetry," these lines can have no pretension to merit.

"How sweet it is, when mother Fancy rocks
The wayward brain, to saunter through a wood!
An old place, full of many a lovely brood,
Tall trees, green arbours, and ground-flowers in flocks;
And wild rose tip-toe upon hawthorn stocks,
Like a bold Girl, who plays her agile pranks
At Wakes and Fairs with wandering Mountebanks, —
When she stands cresting the Clown's head, and mocks
The crowd beneath her. Verily I think,
Such place to me is sometimes like a dream
Or map of the whole world: thoughts, link by link,
Enter through ears and eyesight, with such gleam
Of all things, that at last in fear I shrink,
And leap at once from the delicious stream."

It was *the Poet's* boast that his verse commended itself to notice, by reason of its having been written for a worthy purpose. "Not," said he, "that I always began to write with a distinct purpose formally conceived; but habits of meditation have, I trust, so prompted and regulated my feelings, that my descriptions of such objects as strongly excite those feelings, will be found to carry along with them a *purpose*. If this opinion be erroneous, I can have little right to the name of a Poet." That

this avowal did credit to his heart, I would not be the man to deny; neither would I appeal to my readers for a verdict in his disfavour, on the evidence afforded by this sonnet. Still, a considerable demand on charity is required to stifle suspicion, that the purpose for which he *thus* wrote may be fairly questioned. A fault he seldom avoided, and which it would seem he thought to constitute one of his chief excellences, — that of vague amplification, comes first under review:

> "To saunter through a wood!
> *An old place*, full of many a lovely brood,
> *Tall trees, green arbours, and ground-flowers in flocks.*"

Examples might be cited, both ancient and modern, in extenuation of this practice; but the *highest* distinction cannot justify either an obscure or thoughtlessly verbose manner of writing. Thus it is alleged that "Aristotle's style, which is frequently so elliptical as to be dry and obscure, is yet often, at the very same time, unnecessarily diffuse, from his enumerating much that the reader would easily have supplied, if the rest had been fully and forcibly stated."* It was as truly superfluous to say that a "wood" is "an old place," consisting of "tall trees, green arbours, and ground-flowers," as to write

> "Five years have past; *five summers, with the length*
> *Of five long winters!*"

Nor is it easy to imagine that *the Poet* would have fallen into this habit, but for the sake of exhibiting what

* Whately's Rhetoric.

his supple reviewer is pleased to call "his conscious power over language." "It is not uncommon to hear a speaker or writer of this class, mentioned as having a 'very fine command of language,' when, perhaps, it might be said with more correctness, that 'his language has a command of him;' *i. e.* that he follows a train of words rather than of thought, and strings together all the striking expressions that occur to him on the subject, instead of first forming a clear notion of the sense he wishes to convey, and then seeking for the most appropriate vehicle in which to convey it. He has but the same 'command of language' that the rider has of a horse which runs away with him."* But a graver fault than that of displaying "his conscious power over language" comes now to be considered, as invalidating Wordsworth's claim to accuracy of observation:

"And wild rose tip-toe upon hawthorn stocks."

Often as he had contemplated the wild rose, surmounting the friendly hawthorn on his way, he had failed to mark that the shrub only blooms when in the full enjoyment of air and light; and thinking that, in the pride of summer, it might adorn his subject, he unwittingly placed it in the wood.† Deeming it then

* Whately.

† In denying to the dog-rose the property of blooming under these circumstances, I can hardly be too explicit in the use of language. By one writer on the subject (Woods), it is asserted, that when the shrub "is weak, and grows in woods or shady places among grass, it has straight prickles, and becomes *Rosa nuda*;" and the fact is quoted as well by Professor Lindley as by Stephenson and Churchill in their Medical Botany. But this is saying too much. Along the boundary of a wood, and within so much of its

the most lovely feature in the scene, he conceived that its attractiveness might be heightened by the aid of *simile;* and whilst "mother Fancy" rocked "the wayward brain," he likened it to

> "a bold Girl, who plays her agile pranks
> At Wakes and Fairs with wandering Mountebanks, —
> When she stands cresting the Clown's head, and mocks
> The crowd beneath her."

In this perplexity, what aid could reflection afford him? None: hence the sequel. "Such place" to him was "sometimes like a dream or *map of the whole world:*" "thoughts," of which unfortunately there is no evidence, "enter through ears and eyesight," till at length the load becomes insupportable, and he leaps "at once from the delicious stream." "Most readers, except those of a very vulgar or puerile taste, are disgusted at studied efforts to point out and force upon their attention whatever is remarkable; and this, even when the ideas conveyed are themselves striking. But when an attempt is made to cover poverty of thought with mock sublimity of language, and to set off trite sentiments and feeble arguments by tawdry magnificence, the only result is, that a kind of indignation is superadded to contempt."*

Much as Wordsworth deprecated the poetic diction of his age, he would spare no pains in the selection of

interior as shall admit the free play of light and air, and not less in its deeper recesses, where sufficient light has been obtained by the felling of large timber, though the undergrowth be profuse, the plant will be found to bloom. It is only beneath the combined and darkening influence of "tall trees" and "green arbours," as depicted by Wordsworth, that it will *not flower*.

* Whately.

figurative language, when, by its use, he thought additional effect could be imparted to his verse. But in attempting an elevated style, his genius commonly failed him. The figure would be so clumsily elaborated as to conceal his meaning, or admit of almost any interpretation that the reader should choose to adopt. In simple narrative, notwithstanding his love of truth, he would be often beguiled into hyperbolical excess. This, however, is not surprising. Hyperbole is the common "resource of an author of feeble imagination; of one, describing objects which either want native dignity in themselves; or whose dignity he cannot show by describing them simply, and in their just proportions, and is therefore obliged to rest upon tumid and exaggerated expressions."* As examples of such weakness, I adduce the following stanzas. A shepherd-boy is crossing a stream,—

> "When list! he hears a piteous moan —
> Again! *his heart within him dies* —
> *His pulse is stopped, his breath is lost,*
> He totters, pallid as a ghost,
> And, looking down, espies
> A lamb, that in the pool is pent
> Within that black and frightful rent."

Of Simon Lee it is said—

> "He all the country could outrun,
> Could leave both man and horse behind;
> And often, ere the chase was done,
> He reeled, *and was stone-blind.*"

* Blair's Rhetoric.

Though offensive to refined taste, this practice is, after all, less objectionable than the ornamental style, in which *the Poet* would occasionally indulge. None can mistake his meaning, where the sense is simply exaggerated; but all are liable to embarrassment when he clothes his sentiment in elaborate metaphor. Take, for instance, the stanza I subjoin on the origin of music:

> "Oblivion may not cover
> All treasures hoarded by the miser, Time.
> Orphean insight! Truth's undaunted lover,
> To the first leagues of tutored passion climb,
> When Music deigned within this grosser sphere
> Her subtle essence to enfold,
> And voice and shell drew forth a tear
> Softer than Nature's self could mould.
> Yet *strenuous* was the infant Age:
> Art, daring because souls could feel,
> Stirred nowhere but an urgent equipage
> Of rapt imagination sped her march
> Through the realms of woe and weal:
> Hell to the lyre bowed low; the upper arch
> Rejoiced that clamorous spell and magic verse
> Her wan disasters could disperse."

To say that this passage is unintelligible to the scholar, would be untrue: but to comprehend its import, though written in his native tongue, he must find a more irksome task than to translate sixteen verses from any one of the heathen poets. And what proportion does this class bear to the general bulk of Wordsworth's readers? And what plea can be urged in extenuation of an author, whose confusedness of

style perpetuates a libel on the simplicity and elegance of the English language? The stanza just quoted is not necessarily obscure, by reason of the subject it was meant to elucidate. A want of clearness of conception on the part of the writer, and of method in the arrangement of his ideas, made it such. "Style has always reference to an author's manner of thinking. It is a picture of the ideas which rise in his mind, and of the manner in which they rise there." He may plead the difficulty of his subject "as an excuse for the want of perspicuity: but the excuse can rarely, if ever, be admitted. For whatever a man conceives clearly, *that* it is in his power, if he will be at the trouble, to put into distinct propositions, or to express clearly to others." Justice demands of me an admission that, on this point, the best authorities do not exactly concur. The distinguished prelate, to whom I am already indebted for corroborative argument, asserts, that "an unpractised writer is liable to be misled by his own knowledge of his own meaning, into supposing those expressions clearly intelligible, which are so to himself; but which may not be so to the reader, whose thoughts are not in the same train. And hence it is that some do not write or speak with so much perspicuity on a subject which has long been very familiar to them, as on one, which they understand indeed, but with which they are less intimately acquainted, and in which their knowledge has been more recently acquired. In the former case it is a matter of some difficulty to keep in mind the necessity of carefully and copiously explaining principles which by long habit have come to assume in our minds the appearance of self-evident truths." But this tes-

timony, valuable as it is, can scarcely be made available to Wordsworth's defence, since, in every stage of life, whether dealing with a simple or an intricate subject, the same radical defect is discoverable. He constructed English verse, as a continental writer might be expected to do, that could not master our national idiom. With few exceptions, his sonnets, confessedly the most admired of his composition, present this abnormal feature. At first sight, the reader is apt to suppose he is encountering a complex metaphor; but a reperusal assures him that he has but to interpret "the real language of men," tortured into the most awkward transposition, for the sake of rhyme and metre. And he who has sufficient discrimination to be pleased with an author, "who frees us from all fatigue of searching for his meaning; who carries us through his subject without any embarrassment or confusion; whose style flows always like a limpid stream, where we see to the very bottom," must hold in just abasement the teaching of one whose verse in nowise partakes of these characteristics.

As a practical moralist, Wordsworth was deservedly esteemed by all who knew him. His life was one of almost uninterrupted tranquillity and enjoyment; and prompted by a desire to make all others equally happy, he strove to inculcate those principles which, from boyhood, he had fondly cherished. Nor can it be denied that, if his poetic talents had been commensurate with the purity of his design, he would have shed a permanent lustre on his name and country. But to have done this would have been *first* to watch the operations of the human heart, under the influences to which man is exposed, in his multifarious dealings with

the world. And surely to one intent on so great a purpose, the city would present stronger attractions than a mountainous and comparatively uninhabited district. Yet thither did he repair, in the heyday of life, to roam over trackless wilds, where his intercourse must have been restricted, for the most part, to such as lived in a condition little better than that of vassalage. There he found his fellow-being, under the galling yoke of servitude, depressed in spirit; and mistaking this depression for an evidence of virtue, inseparable from his pursuits, he acquired a belief that in rustic simplicity "the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature." No greater error could have befallen him. All history is agreed that man, in his primitive habit, is a barbarian. Such, indeed, had been the character of the people in the northern extremity of the kingdom, down to a period almost within the recollection of the living; for, according to Macaulay, "the magistrates of Northumberland and Cumberland were authorised to raise bands of armed men for the defence of property and order; and provision was made for meeting the expense of these levies by local taxation." "Within the memory of some," he observes, "whom this generation has seen, the sportsman who wandered in pursuit of game to the sources of the Tyne, found the heaths round Keeldar Castle peopled by a race scarcely less savage than the Indians of California, and heard with surprise the half-naked women chanting a wild measure, while the men with brandished dirks danced a war-dance."* Under a rigorous administration of the

* Macaulay's History of England, vol. i. p. 284—286.

criminal law, and the growing resources of the government, these marauders were at length subdued. In the train of peace followed industry, with its corresponding reward; and the blessings of civilisation became the inheritance of those with whom Wordsworth was content to live and die. Distinguished as he was by a placidity of manner, and an intelligence immeasurably beyond that of his neighbours, he could not fail to win their esteem. This begat a reciprocity of sentiment; their occupations, their pleasures, their penury, furnished a constant source of inspiration; and *the Poet* and peasant were now leagued together in a bond of indissoluble alliance. In the simplicity of faith, he ascribed to "natural hearts" all the finer impulses of humanity; and though now and then unfortunate in the selection of his characters, and still more so in his manner of treating them, he obviously laboured with a view to elevate the tone of their moral being. Far from admitting that

> "Chill penury repressed their noble rage,
> And froze the genial current of the soul,"

he would be disposed to consider adversity propitious to his design; for of his "Wanderer" in the "Excursion" is it said that "the growth of intellect" was advanced,

> "And every moral feeling of his soul
> Strengthened and braced, by breathing in content
> The keen, the wholesome, air of poverty,
> And drinking from the well of homely life."

With what effect his ministrations were conducted it is hard to determine: but it augured badly for his

renown that his local bookseller is reported never to have been asked for a copy of his works. The readiness with which he accredited the vulgar with natural endowments of the highest worth, ended in his toleration of their worst vices. Stephen Hill's treachery receives a passing censure; but Martha Ray, who is assumed to have destroyed her new-born infant, escapes with impunity. Goody Blake, who systematically provided herself with fuel at Harry Gill's expense, obtains a full measure of *the Poet's* sympathy; whilst the latter is declared to have been visited with an incurable affliction, for having arrested the thief in her depredations. "The Farmer of Tilsbury Vale," in adversity, borrowed largely of his friends, and decamped to London with the bulk of his treasure. What is his condemnation?

"You lift up your eyes! — but I guess that you frame
A judgment too harsh of the sin and the shame;
In him it was scarcely a business of art,
For this he did all in the *ease* of his heart."

Thus would he degrade his heroes by a recital of their misdoings, and then incur the obloquy attached to their defence. With this predilection for "the beautiful and true," of which it has become the habit of every silly idealist to dream, it is easy to conceive that *the Poet* would not be slow to recognise, in the higher grades of life, a participation of the natural graces that adorn mankind. Nor was he,

"for this single cause,
That we have all of us one human heart."

In the soul he discovered a fount of blessedness that manifests itself in our universal relationship to the

world, in spite of the perversion to which our faculties are submitted: hence, in addressing Southey, he observes, "what virtue and what goodness, what heroism and courage, what triumphs of disinterested love everywhere, and human life, after all, what it is!" In this sense he stands in vivid contrast with Byron, who could seldom contemplate man but in that deadly phase which least betokens a capacity for good. Too often it would seem that Wordsworth's religion, like Dogberry's learning, "came by nature," whilst Byron had not even that. The former would have proscribed the necessary responsibilities of life, and have converted the earth into a vast theatre of innocent amusement; the latter would have reduced it to a material hell! Each taking up a false position, they were both bad teachers. That Wordsworth wrongly estimated the moral susceptibilities of our nature, will be evident on turning to some of his didactic lessons. The first I shall quote has been singled out from amongst many, on account of the beautiful poetry with which it accidentally abounds:

"It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,
The holy time is quiet as a Nun
Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
Is sinking down in its tranquillity;
The gentleness of heaven broods o'er the sea:
Listen! the mighty Being is awake,
And doth with his eternal motion make
A sound like thunder — everlastingly.
Dear Child! dear Girl! that walkest with me here,
If thou appear untouched by solemn thought
Thy nature is not therefore less divine:
Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year;
And worship'st at the Temple's inner shrine,
God being with thee when we know it not."

If, when limiting himself to the choice of language "really used by men," *the Poet* had been elsewhere equally fortunate in its selection and arrangement, as in the sonnet under consideration, that unconscionable class of reviewers, whose anathemas I have provoked, would not have had to charge me with the abuse of a good man. Unsullied by affectation, — but easy, graceful, and pointedly expressive of the author's meaning, the first five lines may bid defiance to honest criticism. And now, having happily depicted the serenity of evening, the writer's attention is arrested by the murmur of the hollow sea, and he avails himself of the fact, as affording an admirable illustration of the Omnipotence of the Deity. This in turn suggests an application of his theme to the spiritual interests of the child with whom he is walking, when he gets betrayed into a maudlin sentimentality opposed to the dignified train of thought in which he has previously conducted his subject. Nor is this all. He assumes too much on behalf of the child: for unmindful of original sin, and its consequences to posterity, he ascribes to her a purity of heart wholly irreconcilable with human frailty, and in a metaphor, too, exclusively pertaining to the "dead in Christ:"

"Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year."

But for the well known integrity of his life, this passage might have been imputed to *the Poet* for profaneness; and, viewed in the most charitable light, it can only strengthen the conviction that his visionary estimate of men and things disqualified him for teaching the sublime truths deducible from revelation.

"Desponding Father! mark this altered bough,
So beautiful of late, with sunshine warmed,
Or moist with dews; what more unsightly now,
Its blossoms shrivelled, and its fruit, if formed,
Invisible? yet Spring her genial brow
Knits not o'er that discolouring and decay
As false to expectation. Nor fret thou
At like unlovely process in the May
Of human life: a Stripling's graces blow,
Fade and are shed, that from their timely fall
(Misdeem it not a cankerous change) may grow
Rich mellow bearings, that for thanks shall call:
In all men, sinful is it to be slow
To hope — in Parents, sinful above all." *

* Whatever may be the present Laureate's respect for the talents of his predecessor, there is little sympathy discoverable in their moral teaching. Mr. Tennyson's versification is proverbially obscure; but he who can penetrate the veil by which he usually contrives to conceal his meaning, will perceive that he has derived his precepts from a much higher source than that of the founder of the Lake school. A comparison of the sonnet I have just quoted with the following stanzas, on a like subject, will prove sufficiently illustrative of the fact: —

"How many a father have I seen,
A sober man among his boys,
Whose youth was full of foolish noise,
Who wears his manhood hale and green:
And dare we to this fancy give,
That had the wild oat not been sown,
The soil, left barren, scarce had grown
The grain by which a man may live?
Oh, if we held the doctrine sound
For life outliving heats of youth,
Yet who would preach it as a truth
To those that eddy round and round?
Hold thou the good; define it well;
For fear divine philosophy
Should push beyond her mark, and be
Procuress to the Lords of Hell."

This sonnet was clearly intended for the solace of a parent oppressed by filial waywardness. Yet a more unfortunate parallel than that which *the Poet* draws between the blossom that precedes fructification, and the transient gracefulness of youth, can hardly be conceived. The former is a necessary antecedent to the elaboration of the germ, and *must be thrown off in the due course of Nature;* the latter is an essential attribute of the soul, which we are strictly enjoined to cherish, as well in Holy Writ, as in the admonition of the best of uninspired writers. To youth belongs not wisdom; neither will the lessons of subsequent experience impart it, if the characteristic simplicity of childhood be lost. It is only by ingrafting on such simplicity judicious counsel, together with the light proceeding from observation and reflection, that we can expect to realise the fruit of early promise. In conformity with this principle, we are instructed to "train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Too often, however, does it happen, on the approach of manhood, that the primal graces are darkened by a growing impatience of control, and the once gentle youth becomes the victim of unholy passion. So certainly does the bias obtained at this momentous period indicate the future character of the man, that every prudent father looks with becoming jealousy on the age of puberty. And are we to be told, when an unfavourable manifestation occurs, not to misdeem it a cankerous change, —that "a stripling's graces blow, fade and are shed, that from their *timely fall* may grow rich mellow bearings, that for thanks shall call?" The doctrine is not only repugnant to reason and revelation, but it fails to

harmonise with *the Poet's* individual experience, as recorded in the following lines:

> "Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
> Shades of the prison-house begin to close
> Upon the growing Boy,
> But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
> He sees it in his joy;
> The Youth, who daily farther from the east
> Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
> And by the vision splendid
> Is on his way attended;
> At length the Man perceives it die away,
> And fade into the light of common day."

The uninitiated in the mysteries of Wordsworth's composition will be so puzzled to explore the meaning of this verse, that I feel bound to attempt a paraphrase. As the immediate gift of God, the soul of infancy is supposed to be comparatively sinless; but having found an abode in the flesh, as growth advances, and the allurements of the world prevail, it becomes more and more estranged from its divine source, — hence, "shades of the prison-house begin to close upon the growing Boy." Still guided, however, by the light of heaven, the Youth pursues his way, until augmenting cares and attractions shall in so far have diverted him from his allegiance to God, as to present him at manhood the instrument of self-government.

Always intent on the instruction of his readers, it was Wordsworth's practice to intersperse his poetry, as opportunity should serve, with what he thought to be useful maxims. But here, as in his more laboured precepts, a like fatality commonly awaited him. In one of

his pastorals, for example, he represents "the Broom" to have addressed "the Oak" in the following strain:

> "Frail is the bond by which we hold
> Our being, whether young or old,
> Wise, foolish, weak, or strong.
>
> Disasters, do the best we can,
> Will reach both great and small;
> *And he is oft the wisest man,*
> *Who is not wise at all.*"

What are we to understand by this expression? Reference to the context would seem to favour a conjecture that *the Poet* had in mind the memorable injunction of the Saviour,—uttered with a view to inspire man with faith in the Providence of God, "Take no thought for your life:" for since He feeds the fowls of the air, and clothes the grass of the field, He will surely provide for the necessities of such as walk in the way of His commandments. But this supposition affords the writer no escape from the charge of absurdity. If he meant to intimate that human foresight, at best, often fails to procure immunity from danger, — that, on the contrary, the very means we employ for that purpose occasionally involve additional hazard, — for the sake of proving that a simple reliance on the protection of Heaven should be our *only* dependence through life, *then* is his position untenable: for it cannot be said of him who, in the discharge of the duties of his station, shall thus heed not the liabilities to which he is exposed, that he "is not wise at all," wisdom belonging exclusively to non-intervention. Of a truth is it said that, "in a misty and darkened mind, the most in-

compatible opinions may exist together, without any perception of their discrepancy;" and I boldly affirm that to no English author of reputation does the remark more justly apply than to Wordsworth. In him the *cacoethes scribendi* obtained uncontrollable dominion. He entertained a conviction that heaven had given him a "strong imagination," with equal vigour of expression; and this awakening the moral faculties to a dread of being betrayed into rashness, he acquired a circumlocutory habit, which, notwithstanding his frequent qualifications, parenthetical and otherwise, involved him in almost every form of literary transgression with which a looseness of style is chargeable. But let this allegation be founded on evidence drawn from his minor poems, and his advocates stoutly maintain that the more comprehensive efforts, on which his claim to distinction rests, are free from such faults. This is to say that though a man shall be unable to acquit himself creditably in a colloquial discourse, he is qualified to deal with the intricacies of a momentous question in the senate-house, — that though he may not do justice to the romantic features of his own neighbourhood, his genius will answer to the requirements of Alpine scenery or the convulsive ocean! It is vain to plead an author's adaptation to a great work, when he lacks the qualifications demanded of him in a less. And that Wordsworth signally failed to portray Nature in her simplest aspect, I have already shown: nor shall I shrink from the responsibility of demonstrating as well, how unsuccessful he was in his attempt to clothe "with her hues, her forms, and with the spirit of her forms — the nakedness of austere truth." In pursuance

of the task, I refer to *the Poet's* interview with "the Wanderer," as related in the first book of "The Excursion." And it is to be borne in mind that, as he manifestly chose to make that personage a type of himself, he would take especial pains to draw the character in the best style of his art. Attaching seniority to "the Wanderer," we are told that *the Poet* was an object of his solicitude in early life; and that, as he grew up, it was his delight to be associated with him.

> "Many a time,
> On holidays, we rambled through the woods:
> We sate — we walked; he pleased me with report
> Of things which he had seen; and often touched
> Abstrusest matter, reasonings of the mind
> Turned inward; or at my request would sing
> Old songs, the product of his native hills;
> A skilful distribution of sweet sounds,
> Feeding the soul."

A ramble "through the woods" implies walking — and walking would suggest an occasional rest. But the author's love of prolixity forbade him to withhold the intelligence "we sate — we walked." *That*, on the contrary, which might have been properly elucidated — "abstrusest matter," is disposed of with a simple intimation that it was something which called for "reasonings of the mind turned inward." Then, at *the Poet's* request, "the Wanderer would sing old songs;" and lest the obtuseness of his readers should fail to apprehend the meaning of song, we are gravely reminded that it consists of "a skilful distribution of sweet sounds," and has the merit withal of "feeding the

soul." Stripped of all needless verbiage, we gather from these lines that, when a boy, Wordsworth walked with this man, and heard him tell tales and sing songs.

Arrived now at manhood, *the Poet* meets his old friend on a summer evening, and proposes a further interview with him on the morrow, under the "covert" of some "clustering elms." This done, he says,

> "Some small portion of his eloquent speech,
> And something that may serve to set in view
> The feeling pleasures of his loneliness,
> His observations, and the thoughts his mind
> Had dealt with — I will here record in verse;
> Which, if with truth it correspond, and sink
> Or rise as venerable Nature leads,
> The high and tender Muses shall accept
> With gracious smile, deliberately pleased,
> And listening Time reward with sacred praise."

Here, again, we have a multitude of words employed to convey few ideas. Surely the Wanderer's "eloquent speech" would embody both his thoughts and feelings; for to it *the Poet* stood indebted for the information he had gained: yet, beside the "speech," we are promised a revelation of his "thoughts," "pleasures," and "observations." What is this but a resort to verbal trickery, for the sake of occupying five lines with the sense that would have been better comprised in two! Even the word "pleasures" is encumbered with an expletive that aggravates the offence in no slight degree:

> "The *feeling* pleasures of his loneliness."

So the phrase—"and sink or rise as venerable Nature leads," is obviously introduced to swell the tide of

words, as is another—"deliberately pleased." *The Poet*, however, declares that he did not designedly commit these errors, and his plea shall not be disregarded. Addressing Sir George Beaumont on the subject of his "Prelude," he says,—"if, when the work shall be finished, it appears to the judicious to have redundancies, they shall be lopped off, if possible, but this is very difficult to do, when a man has written with thought; and this defect, whenever I have suspected it, or found it to exist, in any writings of mine, I have always found incurable. The fault lies too deep, and is in the first conception." *

The story of "the Wanderer's" life formed the chief topic of his "speech." "Among the hills of Athol he was born," of goodly parentage,—having acquired "an habitual piety" whilst yet a child. When six years old, he tended cattle in summer, and in winter walked to a distant school. Being of a meditative disposition, he was careful "to turn his ear and eye on all things which the moving seasons brought to feed such appetite." Thus constituted, he had the less need of books: still he read with avidity such as fell in his way; and wanted now but

> "the pure delight of love
> By sound diffused, or by the breathing air,
> Or by the silent looks of happy things,
> Or flowing from the universal face
> Of earth and sky."

So rapid, however, was his advancement in all the graces that enrich the soul, that soon, where'er he looked, he could read "unutterable love."

* Memoirs of Wordsworth, vol. i. p. 306.

"Sound needed none,
Nor any voice of joy: his spirit drank
The spectacle: sensation, soul, and form,
All melted into him; they swallowed up
His animal being: in them did he live,
And by them did he live; they were his life.
In such access of mind, in such high hour
Of visitation from the living God,
Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired.
No thanks he breathed, he proffered no request;
Rapt into still communion that transcends
The imperfect offices of prayer and praise,
His mind was a thanksgiving to the power
That made him: it was blessedness and love!"

On the merit of this quotation, writers of acknowledged authority have disagreed. Coleridge insisted that it was one of transcendent excellence; the "Edinburgh Review" denounced it altogether. Both were mistaken: for though faulty, by reason of its incongruity of sentiment, and general irreconcilableness with truth, the passage is nevertheless highly poetical. "Sound needed none," if intended, as I doubt not it was, to intimate that every inanimate object silently bespoke the Hand that made it, less happily conveys the sense than would the phrase,—nor need of sound, "nor any voice of joy." But waiving this objection, *the Poet* now, by a vivid exercise of the imagination, to which he rarely attained, conceives the youth to have been so thoroughly absorbed in the contemplation of Nature, and the beneficence of her Great Author, as to have sunk into a state of pleasing deliquium:

"*Thought was not;* in enjoyment *it expired.*
No thanks he breathed, he proffered no request;"

How, then, in the absence of thought, could he be "rapt into still communion" with his Maker? And how could it be said that "his mind was a thanksgiving to the power that made him," when negatived by an avowal that he breathed no thanks? Well may it be said that a transition from the sublime to the ridiculous is of easy descent. And here I would ask any — the most impassioned, admirer of Wordsworth's verse — if his faith in the author's adherence to truth is not already shaken. It will avail nothing to urge on his behalf the common licence awarded to poetry,—inasmuch as he pleaded the truthfulness of his narrative as the condition on which he should rely for present and posthumous fame. Not to the youth enamoured of Nature's charms, nor to the purest of "God's heritage" can language like this apply. *The Poet,* however, thought otherwise; and confiding in the perfectibility of man, no less than in his own capacity to prove it, he soon involves himself in an inextricable dilemma. As a Christian philosopher, it might be thought that when surveying the perishable face of Nature from the mountain-top, his hero would be reminded of the mutability of all things, — that with earth and sea stretched out to view, he would meditate with sacred awe on the final edict, when "the angel" should swear "by him that liveth for ever and ever, that there should be time no longer," and the earth and the works therein be burned up, in pursuance of the sentence. But not so.

> "Early had he learned
> To reverence the volume that displays
> The mystery, the life which cannot die;
> But in the mountains did he *feel* his faith.

All things, responsive to the writing, there
Breathed immortality, revolving life,
And greatness still revolving; infinite:
There littleness was not; the least of things
Seemed infinite; and there his spirit shaped
Her prospects, nor did he believe,—he *saw*."*

That Wordsworth's biblical knowledge was very limited, is too palpable to be denied. The poetry of the

* A doctrine much less at variance with the authority of Inspiration than that conveyed in this passage is propounded in "Festus," where Lucifer thus addresses the Angel of Earth:

"'Tis earth shall lead destruction; she shall end.
The stars shall wonder why she comes no more
On her accustomed orbit, and the sun
Miss one of his apostle lights; the moon,
An orphan orb, shall seek for earth as yet,
Through time's untrodden depths and find her not;
No more shall morn, out of the holy East,
Stream o'er the amber air her level light;
Nor evening, with the spectral fingers, draw
Her star-sprent curtain round the head of earth;
Her footsteps never thence again shall grace
The blue sublime of heaven. Her grave is dug.
I see the stars, night-clad, all gathering
In long and sad procession. Death's at work.
And, one by one, shall all yon wandering worlds,
Whether in orbed path they roll, or trail,
In an inestimable length of light,
Their golden train of tresses after them,
Cease; and the sun, centre and sire of light,
The keystone of the world-built arch of heaven
Be left in burning solitude. The stars,
Which stand as thick as dew-drops on the fields
Of heaven, and all they comprehend, shall pass.
The spirits of all worlds shall all depart
To their great destinies; and thou and I,
Greater in grief than worlds, shall live as now."

Old Testament horrified him; and it is certain that a better acquaintance with the *New* would have suggested something more consonant with revelation than is discoverable in these lines. His assumption that belief is an exercise of the mind independent of, and incompatible with, a demonstration of that to which such belief applies, is singularly absurd; for if the last clause in this citation mean anything, it insinuates that the moral credit we attach to testimony, unaided by the evidence of our own senses, ceases to be entertained so soon as its reasonableness appears self-evident.* The subject being truly spiritual, I shall meet its demands by reference to the best of all teachers. "Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

Abounding with pleasurable emotion, it would seem, from "the Wanderer's" narrative, that up to his eighteenth year he continued to preserve his pastoral charge "among the hills," diligently regarding the instruction of Nature, and that of the best authorities to which he could gain access.

> "These occupations oftentimes deceived
> The listless hours, while in the hollow vale,
> Hollow and green, he lay on the green turf
> In pensive idleness."

* Belief admits of all degrees from the slightest suspicion to the fullest assurance. — *Reid, on the Powers of the Human Mind.*

Now, can any enlightened reader have accompanied me thus far in my analysis of this poem, without surmising that, if its author could have been made sensible of the misfortunes that betided him, he would at this crisis have terminated his "Excursion?" Here have we a studied effort at precision, conducing to the silliest result. "In the hollow vale, *hollow* and *green*, he lay on the *green* turf in pensive *idleness*," though occupied in severe study! If "the Wanderer" *did* give this account of himself, it can excite no wonder that when, at the instance of his mother, "he essayed to teach a village-school" it should be found "a task he was unable to perform." With all his good qualities, natural and acquired, a pedlar's life must have been much more congenial to his habits. And in that conviction, he presently sets out on a new career.

> "From his native hills
> He wandered far; much did he see of men,
> Their manners, their enjoyments, and pursuits,
> Their passions and their feelings."

Travelling as he did over a thinly peopled district, he would see little of man, and still less of his true character. His negotiations would be conducted in a bland, insinuating manner, that would beget a corresponding plausibility in others; and not until his credulity should have incurred for him disappointment and loss, would he approach to a correct estimate of his own species. Progressively would experience teach him the deceitfulness of the human heart; and just in proportion to the extent of his intercourse with the world, would a necessary regard to his own interest

awaken suspicion and wariness. Selfishness in a while would be the predominant passion; and an itinerant life, crowned with independence, would inevitably effect a change in the disposition of the man. Having neither wife nor child, nor any of those domestic associations that enkindle sympathy, but traversing continually a wide circuit in pursuit of gain, he could form but a slender attachment to person or place: and to suppose an individual thus occupied to be capable of participating in all the enjoyments and sufferings of humanity, wherever he went, is to invest him with the attributes of Deity.

There is no part of poetical execution more difficult, than to draw a perfect character in such a manner, as to render it distinct and affecting to the mind. Some strokes of human imperfection and frailty, are what usually give us the most clear view, and the most sensible impression of a character; because they present to us a man, such as we have seen; they recall known features of human nature. When poets attempt to go beyond this range, and describe a faultless hero, they, for the most part, set before us a sort of vague undistinguishable character, such as the imagination cannot lay hold of, or realise to itself, as the object of affection." * This is precisely Wordsworth's case: blinded by self-love to a just estimate of himself, he proceeds to say of "the Wanderer" that

> "In the woods,
> A lone enthusiast, and among the fields,
> Itinerant in this labour, he had passed
> The better portion of his time; and there

* Blair on the Poems of Ossian.

Spontaneously had his affections thriven
Amid the bounties of the year, the peace
And liberty of nature; there he kept
In solitude and solitary thought
His mind in a just equipoise of love.
Serene it was, unclouded by the cares
Of ordinary life; unvexed, unwarped
By partial bondage. In his steady course,
No piteous revolutions had he felt,
No wild varieties of joy and grief.
Unoccupied by sorrow of its own,
His heart lay open; and, by nature tuned
And constant disposition of his thoughts
To sympathy with man, he was alive
To all that was enjoyed where'er he went,
And all that was endured."

To reconcile the incongruities implied in this passage would be impossible. Burthened with merchandise, and exposed to the vicissitude of the seasons,—now "drooping" and now "blithe of heart," as related of himself elsewhere, — "the Wanderer" yet "no piteous revolutions" had sustained. Although teeming with enthusiasm, and following a vocation proverbially precarious, he still kept his mind "unclouded by the cares of ordinary life." In the woods and fields, as on the mountain-top, his heart is susceptible of intense emotion, yet has he known "no wild varieties of joy and grief." His liveliest demonstrations had been reserved for those who should buy his wares; and, having no sorrow of his own, "he could afford to suffer with those whom he saw suffer." To one of *the Poet's* pseudo-philosophical character, this doctrine might have suggested a theory, that to every man is allotted a proper measure of feel-

ing, which, if not called into exercise by his own necessities, must be made subservient to the advantage of others. While deeply imbued, as he once was, with republican principles, it might have served him with an admirable pretext for levying contributions on the titled and the rich! But I will not sport with the subject; for by this time the reader will have grown tired of "The Excursion," as, indeed, have I. Justice demands at my hands an acknowledgment that the poem is not throughout equally faulty. The simplest part of the narrative is interesting. When aiming at sublimity or metaphysical refinement, his failure is most conspicuous. He had neither native genius nor accomplishments to insure success in a lofty undertaking: yet would he encounter difficulties, into which nothing but inordinate vanity could have betrayed him, and blunder along, as I have shown, unconscious of his error. It may reasonably excite surprise, that we have no record of private remonstrance or correction from any one of the literary phalanx of which he was a member. To this unhappy circumstance, in a career otherwise distinguished for good fortune, may probably be imputed the memorable declaration he made to Southey, when alluding to the maledictions hurled at "The Excursion:" "Let the age continue to love its own darkness; I shall continue to write, with, I trust, the light of heaven upon me."*

Recurring to the principles on which Wordsworth proposed to establish a new era in the history of song, we find him inveighing against the composition of nearly all that had preceded him in the divine art. He would have

* Wordsworth's Memoirs, vol. ii. p. 52.

torn down the gorgeous Temple of the Muses, and have reconstructed it after his own humble fashion; he would have driven thence all the sons of ancient chivalry, and have dedicated it afresh exclusively to the ballad. Thus he observes, "If my conclusions are admitted, and carried as far as they must be carried if admitted at all, our judgments concerning the works of the greatest poets both ancient and modern will be far different from what they are at present, both when we praise, and when we censure." Tame and spiritless as he was, it might be supposed that the writers who abound in liveliness of metaphor and freshness of simile, would provoke his greatest abhorrence. Accordingly, "poor Macpherson," as he designates him, incurs the largest share of obloquy,—not simply on the ground of the imposition he attempted to practise on the credulity of others, but on the score of his exuberant display of figurative language, and alleged *false imagery*. "In nature," says Wordsworth, "every thing is distinct, yet nothing defined into absolute independent singleness. In Macpherson's work, it is exactly the reverse; every thing (that is not stolen) is in this manner defined, insulated, dislocated, deadened,—yet nothing distinct. It will always be so when words are substituted for things." For an instant I propose to consider the force of this objection. "In nature every thing is distinct, yet nothing defined into absolute independent singleness." Whether, in the animal, vegetable, or mineral kingdom, we contemplate an object, it may be said to be distinct; for if it were not so, it would be inappreciable to the senses. As well also does one animal hold a necessary relationship to others of its species, as are *all* dependent

on the bounty of the earth for repose and sustenance. And so, by parity of reasoning, of every thing, animate and inanimate. It is this necessary connection of matter with matter, that confers harmony on the face of Nature, and bespeaks the wonderful design of its Author. But, because a river is indebted to a substratum for the bed on which it rolls, and a tree, for the nutriment that sustains it, to the ground on which it stands, shall neither river nor tree obtain special commemoration at the hand of the poet? If mutual dependence is strictly to be regarded, where is the line of separation to be drawn? An objection raised to the insulating of a river or tree, would equally apply to the landscape. What, then, can have been the secret prompting to cavil? Envy—and that to an extent which rarely disturbs the mind of one devoted to the true interest of literature. It is impossible to mistake the *animus;* for, by an unfortunate stroke of policy, all that is chargeable on the genius of Macpherson obtains unqualified condemnation, whilst a semblance of generosity is extended to that which is assumed to have been stolen. The injustice of *the Poet's* strictures I will, however, more immediately exemplify, by reference to Ossian. First, let me premise, that "a poet of original genius is always distinguished by his talent for description. A second-rate writer discerns nothing new or peculiar in the object he means to describe. His conceptions of it are vague and loose; his expressions feeble; and of course the object is presented to us indistinctly and as through a cloud. But a true poet makes us imagine that we see it before our eyes: he catches the distinguishing features; he gives it the colours of life and reality; he places it in such a

light that a painter could copy after him. This happy talent is chiefly owing to a lively imagination, which first receives a strong impression of the object; and then, by a proper selection of capital picturesque circumstances employed in describing it, transmits that impression in its full force to the imaginations of others."* Turning, now, to this "far-famed book," as did Wordsworth, I open upon "Berrathon," and read, "Bend thy blue course, O stream! round the narrow plain of Lutha. Let the green woods hang over it, from their hills: the sun look on it at noon. The thistle is there on its rock, and shakes its beard to the wind. The flower hangs its heavy head, waving, at times, to the gale. 'Why dost thou awake me, O gale?' it seems to say, 'I am covered with the drops of heaven. The time of my fading is near, the blast that shall scatter my leaves. To-morrow shall the traveller come; he that saw me in my beauty shall come. His eyes will search the field, but they will not find me.' So shall they search in vain for the voice of Cona, after it has failed in the field. The hunter shall come forth in the morning, and the voice of my harp shall not be heard." Where is the man who, although comparatively insensible to the charms of poetry, can read these lines, without having his attention arrested by the simplicity and truthfulness, with which the several objects enumerated are set forth? So vividly are they portrayed, that the picture quickens before his view, with all the pleasing associations of reality, and the bold outline is at once filled up by the suggestion of his own musings. Nor is descriptive fidelity the

* Blair on the Poems of Ossian.

only feature that entitles the passage to admiration. It exhibits the taste and judgment of a consummate master, engaged in awakening the sympathy of his readers for the pathetic record of the death of Malvina; and whether correctness of imagery, or depth and tenderness of sentiment be the test of its merit, it yields but to the inimitable beauty of the sacred writings. It is needless to multiply citations: "the same rapid and animated style, the same strong colouring of imagination, and the same glowing sensibility of heart," pervade the entire work. But for the moral considerations involved in the question, it might afford amusement to witness the earnestness with which Wordsworth labours to affix the charge of indistinctness, so peculiarly due to himself, on an author to whom it can in nowise apply. Nor does such obliquity of mind discover itself only in his dealings with Ossian. It is seen, as I shall presently have occasion to show, almost wherever he points to the imaginary infirmities of others: for whilst he believed that all the intellectual and moral faculties that confer the highest worth on man were happily blended in himself, he imputed, as by infatuation, the very weaknesses for which he was notorious to those who were comparatively exempt from them. Confining my observations, however, at present, to *the Poet's* critique on Ossian, it may serve the cause of truth to inquire with what better effect he treated a subject akin to that which I have quoted from "Berrathon:"

"Return, Content! for fondly I pursued,
Even when a child, the streams — unheard, unseen;
Through tangled woods, impending rocks between:
Or, free as air, with flying inquest viewed

The sullen reservoirs whence their bold brood —
Pure as the morning, fretful, boisterous, keen,
Green as the salt-sea billows, white and green —
Poured down the hills, a choral multitude!
Nor have I tracked their course for scanty gains;
They taught me random cares and truant joys,
That shield from mischief and preserve from stains
Vague minds, while men are growing out of boys;
Maturer Fancy owes to their rough noise
Impetuous thoughts that brook not servile reins."

What do we learn from this bombastic sonnet? That, when young, like other boys, *the Poet* strolled up or down the margin of the streams, as his inclination should lead him, and thus escaped the mischief into which he might otherwise have fallen. Beyond the vain boast that ekes out the piece, we have nothing more. "It will always be so when words are substituted for things." Who, then, after comparing the manner in which Macpherson and Wordsworth fulfil the intention of descriptive poetry, can be at a loss to determine the position they respectively occupy? Under the impulse of strong feeling, the former seizes upon the most inviting features of Nature, and depicts them with the vigour and exactness of lifelike individuality; the latter, prompted by some vague reminiscence, casually glances at the scenery before him, and leaves it invested in misty generalities. The one derives immediate inspiration from the form, quality, and disposition, of the objects best calculated to aid his design; the other wanders along with indefinite purpose,

"Alive to all things and forgetting all."

No impartial critic will impugn the decision of Sir Walter Scott, that the question of the authenticity of Ossian ought not to be confounded with the literary merit of the work. On the subject of such merit, a conflict of opinion might have been expected. The author's "manner is so different from that of the poets to whom we are most accustomed; his style is so concise, and so much crowded with imagery; the mind is kept at such a stretch in accompanying the author; that an ordinary reader is at first apt to be dazzled and fatigued, rather than pleased. His poems require to be taken up at intervals, and to be frequently reviewed; and then it is impossible but his beauties must open to every reader who is capable of sensibility. Those who have the highest degree of it, will relish them the most."* To acquit Wordsworth of envy, therefore, is but to stigmatise him with a want of feeling; and thus I arrive, by negative evidence, at the position from which I started. "The moving accident," said he, "is not my trade;" and he is as little to be suspected of sympathy with Ossian, in the pathetic scenes he describes, as of that loftiness of soul which is essential to a correct estimate of his sublime conceptions. The worth of this writer lies in the successful employment of faculties, which no training on the part of Wordsworth could bring into creditable exercise: so that, failing, from constitutional inaptitude, to discover the merit of Macpherson's genius, and provoked to envy by the laudations with which it was rewarded, both at home and abroad, he deliberately engaged in the ungracious task of maligning it at the expense of truth. For he hesitated not to affirm that

* Blair on Ossian.

" no succeeding writer appears to have caught from (Ossian) a ray of inspiration; no author, in the least distinguished, has ventured formally to imitate (him), except the boy, Chatterton;" although he must, or ought to, have known, that Byron had attempted his style, and that Scott had acknowledged his obligations to him.* It is no slight tribute to the fame of Macpherson to report, that as Alexander feasted on the Iliad, and Quintus Cicero on Lucretius, so Napoleon Buonaparte treasured Ossian with the enthusiasm naturally entertained by one genius for the productions of another. Would that, in his study of Fingal, he had profited more largely by the King's lesson to Oscar, for the regulation of his conduct in peace and war, which I am tempted to transcribe. " Son of my son," began the King, " O Oscar, pride of youth! I saw the shining of thy sword. I gloried in my race. Pursue the fame of our fathers; be thou what they have been, when Trenmor lived, the first of men, and Trathal, the father of heroes! They fought the battle in their youth. They are the song of bards. O Oscar! bend the strong in arm, but spare the feeble hand. Be thou a stream of many tides against the foes of thy people; but like the gale, that moves the grass, to those who ask thine aid.

* It must have been a source of disquietude to the admirers of the Lake poets to witness with what reluctance, through life, the late Laureate conceded to his friend Coleridge a common measure of poetical justice. With the substitution of the lily for the thistle, is to be found, from Coleridge's hand, a remarkable imitation of Ossian, in a short poem, bearing date 1794; and yet, in an essay following Wordsworth's preface to his works, dated 1815, all mention of the fact is carefully avoided, though none can have been more cognizant of its execution and fidelity.

So Trenmor lived; such Trathal was; and such has Fingal been. My arm was the support of the injured; the weak rested behind the lightning of my steel."

Testimony still more honourable to the reputation of Macpherson than that of military chieftains and emperors, is to be found in the cordial reception afforded to Ossian at the hands of accomplished scholars. The author's style, in many instances, so closely resembles that of the poetical writers of the Old Testament, that Dr. Mason Good, whose oriental learning was hardly surpassed by that of Sir William Jones, has greatly enriched the notes appended to his translation of the Book of Job, by parallelisms obtained from this source. One might have supposed that a revival of the ancient spirit of poetry, in an age when the wildness of enthusiasm had succumbed to the restrictions of art, would be hailed by even Wordsworth as a seasonable leaven; but neither respect for antiquity, nor reverence for the Sacred Fount whence the earliest poets drew their "happiest draughts of inspiration," served to conciliate him. He disliked the florid diction of the Hebrew writers no less than that of the Celtic bard: hence his studied avoidance of biblical phraseology. Apart from his ecclesiastical sonnets, which were obviously composed for a political purpose, it would be difficult to find a modern poet, who has written so much, and infused so little, of either the spirit or language of the Old Testament into his works. His reason for such omission may be easily detected in the following passage. "Now as the translators of the Bible, and Shakspeare, Milton, and Pope, could not be indebted to Macpherson, it follows that he must have owed his fine feathers to them."

To have admitted the propriety of the bold figurative language employed by the inspired writers, would have been at once to demolish the system he hoped to establish: and lightly as he valued the moral influence of God's word upon the heart of man, he would not have dared to argue that the poetical books of the Old Testament would have better fulfilled the intention of Heaven, if stripped of their "*fine feathers*,"—therefore he quietly disposed of the subject with an *oblique* attempt to depreciate their worth. Had its author held a less conspicuous place in our national literature, this outrage on Christianity would have been best repaid with silent pity. But there are no few who regard him as a "Great Teacher." I mean not the self-constituted arbiters of public opinion, who, if dragged from their obscurity, would be found, for the most part, too nearly allied to another class of adventurers, whose manipulations are the dread of nobler minds; but men of character and education, who, believing what they say, diffuse, with truly apostolic zeal, "their light where'er they go." Not long since I heard a clergyman*, pre-eminently distinguished for learning and piety, publicly contend, though on scanty, insufficient premises, for Wordsworth's claim to the merit of "a Great Teacher." Now, I would respectfully ask all such advocates of the late Laureate, with what complacency they can look on a mean colloquial diction, whose main passport to notice is that of rhyme and metre, when contrasted with the metaphorical splendour of the inspired writers? Turn, for example, to Isaiah's prophetic announcement of the coming of Christ. "And there shall come forth a rod

* The Rev. Henry Alford of Wymeswold.

out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."* So, in the following beautiful simile, and the verses immediately ensuing: "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall

* Ch. xi. ver. 1—9.

prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."* But we have the *direct* authority of Heaven, for the employment of the very diction that it was the study of Wordsworth's life to decry, as may be learned by reference to the 38th chapter of the Book of Job, where the Almighty appeals to the fashioning of the universe, in attestation of His wisdom and power. And the Psalmist, catching the spirit of the Divine Author, has, in like beautiful imagery, extolled His marvellous works in the sacred idyl which I shall partly quote: "O Lord my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty. Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain: Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind: Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire: Who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever. Thou coveredst it with the deep as with a garment: the waters stood above the mountains. At thy rebuke they fled; at the voice of thy thunder they hasted away. They go up by the mountains; they go down by the valleys unto the place which thou hast founded for them. Thou hast set a bound that they may not pass over; that they turn not again to cover the earth. He

* Ch. lv. ver. 10—13.

sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field: the wild asses quench their thirst. By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches. He watereth the hills from his chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works."*

Contempt for the *word* of God almost of necessity induces distrust in the *authenticity* of revelation; and it is to be feared that Wordsworth's insensibility to the charms of Hebrew poetry tended, in no slight degree, to disturb his faith in the efficacy of Divine truth. Many passages might be gleaned from his verse, besides those which I have adduced, to justify suspicion. Nor is the cloud that hangs upon the subject in anywise dispelled by accessory evidence, derived from his political career. He first appeared in the character of a revolutionist; but having the good fortune, while young, to obtain the patronage of the rich and the powerful, he quickly abandoned his democratic principles for those of a more lucrative tendency, and at length gloried in the pride of aristocratic bigotry and intolerance. In this position, he acknowledged a profound reverence for the Established Church and her sacred ritual; but he would have persecuted dissent with the rigour that marked the age of the early nonconformists. So heartily did he despise sectarianism, that he would have crushed the operations of the Bible Society to gratify his prejudice. Had not the fact been recorded in his Memoirs, it would hardly have been credited, that the man who affected the meekness of a Puritan had refused to co-operate with the various

* Psalm civ. ver. 1—13.

sections of the Christian Church, in dispensing the word of light and life to perishing sinners. His language, addressed to Archdeacon Wrangham, is — "As to the *indirect* benefits expected from (the Bible Society), as producing a golden age of unanimity among Christians, all that I think fume and emptiness; nay, far worse. So deeply am I persuaded that discord and artifice, and pride and ambition, would be fostered by such an approximation and unnatural alliance of sects, that I am inclined to think the evil thus produced would more than outweigh the good done by dispersing the Bibles."* And this from one who, by an unfortunate perversion of human sagacity, is yet thought by some divines to deserve the appellation of a "great Teacher." Another step, and he would have launched into open apostasy.

It is truly observed by Archbishop Whately, that "the best painters and poets, and such as are best versed in the principles of those arts, are in general (when rivalry is out of the question) the most powerfully affected by paintings and by poetry, of superior excellence." Conversely applied, this maxim furnishes as conclusive a test of Wordsworth's merit, as does a critical examination of his verse. He had no relish for those sublime conceptions of Creative Wisdom that bear immediate testimony to the Divine Source from which they were derived; and regarded with equal indifference the exquisite tenderness of diction in which was celebrated the beneficence of Heaven. He thus tacitly undervalued that which, in every subsequent age, has been held by the best authorities to constitute the highest standard of poetic excellence. In the province of criti-

* Memoirs, vol. ii. p. 8.

cism, then, as in that of poetry, he can be ranked but with an humble class. After this exposition of his judgment, the reader will be prepared to learn that his estimate of modern poets was in perfect harmony with the views he entertained of the greatest writers of antiquity. To Dryden he doled out praise in so exceptionable a manner, that his summary of the qualifications of that vigorous writer, as expressed in a letter to Sir Walter Scott, on hearing that he was about to edit a new edition of the poet's works, may be considered unique. The most sensitive moralist would be at a loss, whether to receive the extract in evidence of the author's absolute incompetence to deal with the subject before him, or as exhibiting an instance of the conflict into which a man is apt to be betrayed against the admonitions of conscience. "I admire," says Wordsworth, "his talents and genius highly, but his is not a poetical genius. The only qualities I can find in Dryden that are *essentially* poetical, are a certain ardour and impetuosity of mind, with an excellent ear. It may seem strange that I do not add to this, great command of language; *that* he certainly has, and of such language too, as it is most desirable that a poet should possess, or rather, that he should not be without. But it is not language that is, in the highest sense of the word, poetical, being neither of the imagination nor of the passions; I mean the amiable, the ennobling, or the intense passions. I do not mean to say that there is nothing of this in Dryden, but as little, I think, as is possible, considering how much he has written."* He who is familiar with Dryden's verse, or with Campbell's admirable delineation of his

* Memoirs, vol. i. p. 317.

character, will instantly discover the worthlessness of this tirade. Pope fared no better at his hands; and Thomson was disposed of in like manner. Even the great lexicographer himself was made amenable to his petty tribunal; for seizing upon his paraphrase of Solomon's admonitory lesson to the sluggard*, with that ill-starred waywardness that ever characterised his critical pretensions, he denounced it altogether as a "hubbub of words." For the convenience of those who might not otherwise obtain access to these lines, I shall take the trouble to transcribe them.

"Turn on the prudent Ant thy heedless eyes,
Observe her labour, Sluggard, and be wise;
No stern command, no monitory voice,
Prescribes her duties, or directs her choice;
Yet, timely provident, she hastes away
To snatch the blessings of a plenteous day;
When fruitful Summer loads the teeming plain,
She crops the harvest, and she stores the grain.
How long shall sloth usurp thy useless hours,
Unnerve thy vigour, and enchain thy powers?
While artful shades thy downy couch enclose,
And soft solicitation courts repose,
Amidst the drowsy charms of dull delight,
Year chases year with unremitted flight,
Till Want now following, fradulent and slow,
Shall spring to seize thee, like an ambushed foe."

But for the poetic degeneracy of the present age, this metrical rendering, in which the spirit of the original is sustained, in so far as is compatible with the freedom of paraphrastic usage, would require no apology at my hands. It bears the peculiar impress of scholarship.

* Proverbs, vi. 6—11.

Every word is so happily chosen, that none but a greater man than Johnson, with like copiousness, could substitute a more appropriate form of expression. Yet, if Wordsworth is to be regarded as an authority, it is a miserable production; for though adorned with no "fine feathers," the language was too nervous for his unimpassioned soul. He would have tolerated a "hubbub of words," provided that the author had taken especial pains to dilute the sense, so as to have carried the paraphrase throughout an entire page. The faculty of abstraction, in its best meaning, he was an utter stranger to; and having neither wit nor humour, he could not have written a smart epigram, if a peerage had been his reward. And weak as was the digestive quality of his mind, he had, with few exceptions, no less dislike of a terse or profound, than of a highly ornamental, writer. That a "hubbub of words" formed the staple product of his Muse has been already pretty fully exemplified; and looking, as he did, with the utmost satisfaction on every effort of his life, it must have constituted the principal source of his enjoyment. Should there, however, at this stage of my inquiry, be found a reader insensible to conviction, I would ask him to what other conclusion he can arrive, after a careful perusal of the following strain:

"A whirl-blast from behind the hill
Rushed o'er the wood with startling sound;
Then — all at once the air was still,
And showers of hailstones pattered round.
Where leafless oaks towered high above,
I sat within an undergrove
Of tallest hollies, tall and green;
A fairer bower was never seen.

From year to year the spacious floor
With withered leaves is covered o'er,
And all the year the bower is green.
But see! where'er the hailstones drop
The withered leaves all skip and hop;
There's not a breeze — no breath of air —
Yet here, and there, and every where
Along the floor, beneath the shade
By those embowering hollies made,
The leaves in myriads jump and spring,
As if with pipes and music rare
Some Robin Good-fellow were there,
And all those leaves, in festive glee,
Were dancing to the minstrelsy."

Now, what does this picture, which one of his reviewers would have declared to be as "perfect as the most exact stickler for truthful representations can desire," teach us? Simply that *the Poet* sat in a wood, consisting of oaks and an undergrowth of hollies, during a hail-storm; and, marvelling to see the dried fallen leaves disturbed by the pelting hail, his Fancy suggested that they might have been dancing to the music of "some Robin Good-fellow." Had the piece been professedly written in burlesque, it might have excited a passing smile; but that a man, avowedly occupied in correcting the literary taste of his countrymen, should have had the effrontery to foist upon them such senseless rhyme as the legitimate fruit of inspiration, is truly astonishing! Nor does his mental idiosyncrasy lose any of its worst features, if we yet pursue him along the devious walks of criticism, whither his erratic spirit would often beguile him. Including Gray amongst those whom he held to have employed a false diction, he selected one of his

sonnets, which happens to contain a few lines of less beauty than the rest; and by way of proving that prose is poetry, and that poetry, in its true acceptation, should be doomed to everlasting extinction, he maintained that those very lines only were entitled to respect. His habitual self-exaggeration even prompted him to believe that he could improve the "Elegy"—of which Byron has truly remarked that it "pleased instantly and eternally." Thus warring continually, on principle, against those authors to whom, by common consent, the highest praise has been awarded, he could not, without seeming partiality, suffer Cowper to escape. And with a fatality worthy of so inglorious a contest, he seized upon some of the "Verses supposed to be written by Alexander Selkirk:"

> "Religion! what treasure untold
> Resides in that heavenly word!
> More precious than silver and gold,
> Or all that this earth can afford.
> But the sound of the church-going bell
> These valleys and rocks never heard,
> Ne'er sighed at the sound of a knell,
> Or smiled when a sabbath appeared."

It would hardly be thought by those who know not the extent of Wordsworth's perverseness, that this stanza could fail to please him. There is no extravagance of idea or language; but the value of religion is gracefully set forth in terms with which every one is familiar, and in exact compliance with the principle he enjoined. Yet hear him: "The first four lines are poorly expressed; some critics would call the language prosaic; the fact is, it would be bad prose, so bad, that it is scarcely worse

in metre.* The epithet 'church-going' applied to a bell, and that by so chaste a writer as Cowper, is an instance of the strange abuses which poets have introduced into their language." This from one whose pretended aspirations were actually realized in the verse before him; and whose corrupt taste in the choice of epithets sanctioned the adoption of "*human* door," "*lazy* bed," &c.! If, for an instant, Wordsworth is to be listened to as a teacher of the divine art, how are his arbitrary restrictions to be complied with? The task of mastering the ancient Sanscrit would be found an amusement, in comparison of the toil and disappointment to which his disciples must submit, in providing for the requirements of so capricious a leader. Taking his own productions at the full value he placed upon them, and looking, moreover, at the difficulties he tried to throw in the way of his followers, it is clear that, as he deemed himself the *first* true poet of Nature, so he cherished a pretty confident expectation that he should be the *last*. With Cowper, however, he has not yet done: for he proceeds to say "the two lines 'Ne'er sighed at the sound,' &c., are, in my opinion, an instance of the language of passion wrested from its proper use, and, from the mere circumstance of the composition being in metre, applied upon an occasion that does not justify such violent expressions." Again I ask how is this dreamy expositor of his own foolish dogmas to be conciliated? We have

* The reader of his Bible will not require to be told, that this "bad prose" is essentially the language of inspiration: "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold."

his assurance that "by fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation, that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted, which a poet may rationally endeavour to impart;" yet no sooner does he meet with a stanza constructed after this manner, by an author of deserved reputation, than he avows his contempt for it. With like apparent sincerity, he says "If the Poet's subject be judiciously chosen, it will naturally, and upon fit occasion, lead him to passions, the language of which, if selected truly and judiciously, must necessarily be dignified and variegated, and alive with metaphors and figures;" but when the happiest illustration of the fact is adduced from the pen of another, he quotes it as "an instance of the language of passion wrested from its proper use, and applied upon an occasion that does not justify such violent expressions." The cultivated reader will readily perceive that the lines embodying these "violent expressions" are the most poetical of those which comprise the stanza. Refined as was the author's taste, he was peculiarly felicitous in clothing the dying reverberation of a "knell" in the rocks and valleys with the metaphorical attribute of a sigh,—and equally so in contrasting it with the more cheerful result of a summons to the house of God, on the return of a sabbath.

Not more arrogantly did Wordsworth labour to multiply the verbal difficulties of every writer besides himself, than he did to show that Nature is so exclusive in her dispensations, that few can pretend to be gifted with the faculty of delineating her charms, or of penetrating the secret operations by which she ministers to the beneficent designs of Heaven. "Not in the lucid

intervals" of "party-strife," or of pleasurable excitement, — nor during the necessary cessation of commercial enterprise, — he contends, "is Nature felt, or can be." A more naked and false assumption could hardly be propagated. The brightest statesmen, while invested with the dignity and responsibilities of office, have found leisure to identify themselves with the interests of literature, and have not unfrequently delighted one class as much by the exercise of imagination, as they have fascinated another by their commanding eloquence. Goldsmith's inspiration will not be questioned; yet he, like Burns, was no less devoted to the shrine of luxury than to that of the Muses: and Glover reconciled the profoundest regard to the duties of a commercial life with the utmost refinement in poetry. Indeed, an appeal to the records of the literary republic would present an almost unbroken refutation of Wordsworth's visionary supposition. Still speaking as the self-appointed oracle of Nature, he says,

> "Nor do words,
> Which practised talent readily affords,
> Prove that her hand has touched responsive chords;"

This is undoubtedly true; and I challenge the whole army of British reviewers, search where they may, to find an author, whose verse affords a more pitiful exemplification of the fact than does that of William Wordsworth! Proceeding in the stealthy current of his spleen, he adds, with especial reference to Byron,

> "Nor has her gentle beauty power to move
> With genuine rapture and with fervent love

> The soul of Genius, if he dare to take
> Life's rule from passion craved for passion's sake;
> Untaught that meekness is the cherished bent
> Of all the truly great and all the innocent."

Now what share can "meekness," to which *the Poet* attaches so much importance, have in obtaining an insight to the boundless treasures of Nature? Patience is indispensable to the investigation of truth; but meekness is unavailable; and, like most other passive virtues, it is rarely combined with a full development of those active properties of the mind which are essential to the true interest of poetry. Neither does it form a conspicuous element in the constitution of man: so that he who, under no greater impulse than is prescribed by meekness, should, like Wordsworth, attempt to portray the passions; or who, aided by warmth of imagination, should conceive meekness to be the prevailing characteristic of mankind, would inevitably fail to give effect to his colouring. Perpetually as the late Laureate amused himself in dallying with Nature, it is difficult to arrive at a precise conception of the light in which he viewed her. At one time the word is used synonymously with Heaven. Thus:

> "The stars are mansions built by Nature's hand."
> "All that we see — is dome, or vault, or nest,
> Or fortress, reared at Nature's sage command."

At another it is employed in a highly restrictive sense:

> "By grace divine,
> Not otherwise, O Nature! we are thine,
> Through good and evil thine, in just degree
> Of rational and manly sympathy."

Then with greater latitude — though obviously with some reservation:

> "But thou, a school-boy, to the sea hadst carried
> Undying recollections; Nature there
> Was with thee; she, who loved us both, she still
> Was with thee; and even so didst thou become
> A *silent* poet."

And now she is identified with the Parent of all things:

> "The spot was made by Nature for herself."

Thus limiting the province of Nature, or stretching it to an indefinite extent, as should best serve his purpose, how could he profitably address himself to the understanding of his readers, or determine the fitness of another to do so? Whilst professing to be the great interpreter of Nature, he had evidently no fixed principle on which to base his system, unless his advocates be prepared to admit that Nature was his God. This granted, much that is now involved in mysticism would be at once intelligible. Then could I understand why meekness was enjoined on Nature's worshippers, — why those who, presuming to meddle with her institutions without acknowledging her divine sovereignty, should be treated as aliens and false oracles in her dominion, — and why *the Poet* congratulated himself on the better place he occupied in her councils than was conceded to the poetical heretics of his day. Nature, I am aware, is allowably "the poet's goddess;" but to say

> "By grace divine,
> Not otherwise, O Nature! we are thine,"

is to exalt her divinity beyond the prescriptive right of even poetry. Nature is properly understood to comprise "the system of things of which ourselves are a part, and which, like ourselves, we conceive to be born or brought into existence, and not to exist as of itself;" and truly as that man holds the most distinguished place in this comprehensive system, does he feel a secret prompting to investigate the laws by which it affects his moral and physical well-being. We are not then to suppose that this boundless field of instruction is the inheritance only of those who delight in the "simple landscape-painting of trees, clouds, precipices, and flowers," or who yet farther pursue a train of moral reflection, the purport of which is to convince us, that by cultivating a refined intercourse with animate and inanimate objects, we may, without the guidance of Heaven, purify the affections, and enlarge our capacity for good, until we shall be fit for the communion of angels. A similar doctrine was taught before the birth of Christianity; but every age has attested its fallacy, from the brilliant era in which it was propounded by Epicurus, down to our own time. So far from yielding to poetry the exclusive privilege of revealing to us the hidden beauties of Nature, it is by no means clear that she sustains her pretensions to transcend other forms of intelligence illustrative of the subject. What comparison can she hold with astronomy, that surveys the depths of illimitable space,—computes the number, magnitude, and distances, of the heavenly bodies, — pursues them in their several orbits, — and exhibits them to our astonished view, "all proclaiming, in sublime, stupendous silence, the perfections of Him of whom they witness?"

Poetry never appears in more lovely attire than when arrayed as the handmaid of science. In this capacity, she may adorn with her beautiful imagery the most exalted theme, and deepen our interest in it: but she cannot rightly take precedence of that spirit of inquiry, which explores the architecture of the heavens, delineates its grandeur, and invites her to its contemplation. Without a more substantial basis than the imagination could supply, what would have been the worth of that elaborate poem on the "Nature of Things" by Titus Lucretius Carus, — a poem that "unfolds to us the rudiments of that philosophy which, under the plastic hands of Gassendi and Newton, has, at length, obtained an eternal triumph over every other hypothesis of the Grecian schools," — a poem "composed in language the most captivating and perspicuous that can result from an equal combination of simplicity and polish — adorned with episodes the most elegant and impressive, and illustrated by all the treasures of natural history?" Conscious of the value of this immortal production, the distinguished author of the "Seasons" luxuriated in its province, and borrowed largely from its stores.

Essentially, there is little difference in the constitution of the poet and the man of science. A glowing enthusiasm is the characteristic of both: but whilst one, like an impassioned lover, seeks to exaggerate the outward attractions of his subject by the aid of imagination, the other, by a process of diligent research, to which the suggestions of a quick conception are often made subservient, endeavours to ascertain its intrinsic merit. Thus it not unfrequently happens that, in a physical disquisition, poetry and science dwell in harmonious

conjunction, as the writings of Darwin and Mason Good, and Armstrong's "Art of preserving Health," abundantly testify. In works professedly physiological, the presiding genius of poetry is even yet more demonstrable. None can have reviewed the brilliant discoveries of Dr. Marshall Hall, with that attention to which they are entitled, without recognising the fact, that to the prevalence of faculties essentially poetical, he has been largely indebted for premises on which to exercise his mature reason; and it is not too much to say that, if his predilection for science had not diverted him from the pursuit of elegant literature, he would have shone as an accomplished poet. That the poetic temperament bears a close analogy to the scientific, may be yet more clearly seen, if we revert to the history of the several members of a family confessedly intellectual. The late Dr. William Hunter was a man of undoubted genius and learning; and having the good fortune to win the confidence of his professional brethren, he obtained at their hands an introduction to a lucrative practice. His brother John, like himself, was endowed by Nature with the rarest gifts; but not being intended for one of the learned professions, his early education was neglected. On the approach of manhood, however, at the instance of his brother, he adopted the healing art; and prosecuted the study of anatomy, physiology, and surgery, with such unexampled diligence, as to earn for himself a deathless reputation. Caring nothing for the literature of the profession, to which his brother was fondly attached, he applied the whole weight of his genius to the discovery of unexplored truth, and thus lived to elevate the questionable practice of operative

surgery to the dignity of a science. As the fruit of a matrimonial alliance, his sister Dorothea bore three children, one of whom, a son, under the auspices of the Hunters, devoted himself to the study of medicine, and became the renowned Dr. Matthew Baillie. A daughter*, with no less enthusiasm, dedicated her life to the pursuit of learning, and had the satisfaction to secure the reward of public applause for her skill in dramatic poetry. Thus the same quality of mind that serves to deal with the intricacies of Nature in one form, is seen to be no less applicable to her purposes in another. To contend for the incompatibility of poetry with science is to deny to genius one of its most striking attributes. And who can have witnessed the triumphs of mechanical invention, without feeling assured that the mind which could contrive and execute so difficult a task, would be equally capable of elaborating an epic, under judicious culture! The beauty, complexity, and harmonious combination of mechanical principles, exhibited in a modern lace machine, would have inspired Homer with unspeakable admiration. It is the material expression of the loftiest form of poetry: and the strenuous exertions now being made by many an artisan, at the close of his day's labour, to overcome the difficulties with which the art of poetry, in the absence of education, is beset, reflect no little lustre on his indomitable courage. Not inconsiderately, then, was it said by Wordsworth, that "poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science." And once more recurring to the subject of astronomy, with a conviction that poetry

* Joanna Baillie.

and science have a mutual interest in each other, I am induced to ask in what degree has Wordsworth fulfilled the obligations of genius to the sublimest theme that can occupy the faculties of man? Or, if it be answered that the firmament was not the sphere in which his Muse delighted to range, I yet would ask what graceful tribute has he subscribed to the character of those who love to track God's "shining foot-prints upon space?" One of the best he could afford is to be found in a poem dedicated "to the small Celandine:"

> "Eyes of some men travel far
> For the finding of a star;
> Up and down the heavens they go,
> Men that keep a mighty rout!
> I'm as great as they, I trow,
> Since the day I found thee out,
> Little Flower! I'll make a stir,
> Like a sage astronomer."

This doggerel might have been tolerated, if the author's playfulness of disposition had been such as to justify a belief, that it was not written in absolute derision of astronomical research. But, as previously asserted, he had neither wit nor humour; and it was his misfortune, moreover, to despise whatever he failed to understand. Philosophy and science, therefore, incurred his heaviest displeasure: their study involved more labour than was consistent with his wandering, desultory habits; and he was as ignorant of both as is the mountain shepherd. Even physiology, that comprehends the laws of organic life—a knowledge of which is indispensable to the successful treatment of disease—he would have proscribed,

in common with all other of the loftier engagements of the mind, as may be learned from the language that falls from the lips of his "Wanderer:"

> "And if indeed there be
> An all-pervading Spirit, upon whom
> Our dark foundations rest, could he design
> That this magnificent effect of power,
> The earth we tread, the sky that we behold
> By day, and all the pomp which night reveals;
> That these — and that superior mystery
> Our vital frame, so fearfully devised,
> And the dread soul within it — should exist
> Only to be examined, pondered, searched,
> Probed, vexed, and criticised? —Accuse me not
> Of arrogance, unknown Wanderer as I am,
> If, having walked with Nature threescore years,
> And offered, far as frailty would allow,
> My heart a daily sacrifice to Truth,
> I now affirm of Nature and of Truth,
> Whom I have served, that their DIVINITY
> Revolts, offended at the ways of men
> Swayed by such motives, to such ends employed;
> Philosophers, who, though the human soul
> Be of a thousand faculties composed,
> And twice ten thousand interests, do yet prize
> This soul, and the transcendent universe,
> No more than as a mirror that reflects
> To proud Self-love her own intelligence;
> That one, poor, finite object, in the abyss
> Of infinite Being, twinkling restlessly!"

Nay, the physician himself he so heartily abhorred, as to forbid him, when no longer the recipient of his aid in life, to approach *the Poet's* grave in death:

"Physician art thou? one, all eyes,
Philosopher! a fingering slave,
One that would peep and botanize
Upon his mother's grave?"

"Wrapt closely in thy sensual fleece,
O turn aside, — and take, I pray,
That he below may rest in peace,
Thy ever-dwindling soul, away!"

In submitting this evidence of Wordsworth's contempt for the investigations of the laws of Nature that have for their object the best interests of humanity, I ask whether I have not established the groundlessness of his pretensions to literary criticism, wherein the wisdom of her institutions is concerned? If we follow him through the lowly department, on which he expended the energies of a long life, we reap neither the fruit of original observation, nor the less palatable reproduction of venerable truths. To the common-place reviewer, whose knowledge of natural history is, for the most part, limited to the very sensible distinction he perceives between the cab-horse and that domesticated little animal which Mr. Canning described as "the delight and solace of antiquated virginity," this objection would not occur; but Jenner or White would have been shocked at the paucity of intelligence discoverable in Wordsworth's verse. Throughout the entire of his works, there is not an acknowledged fact presented in so pleasing a light as is that contained in the following stanza to the Cuckoo:

"Soon as the pea puts on the bloom,
Thou fliest the vocal vale,
An annual guest in other lands,
Another Spring to hail!"

To the impartial critic I would say, read Wordsworth's effusions on the character of this bird; and then turn to Logan, from whose poem on the same subject I have selected the preceding stanza, and mark the difference between genuine and affected inspiration! Nor less striking is Bloomfield's superiority, when contrasted with the parent of the Lake school. Unassisted in his inquiry, the reader might fail to discover in the following lines, an intimation that every season provides abundant scope for pleasurable reflection, — but that Spring has been the most fertile source of enjoyment to the late Laureate, and has consequently supplied him, as his verse attests, with the most agreeable topics on which to wing his Muse.

"Glad thought for every season! but the Spring
Gave it while cares were weighing on my heart,
'Mid song of birds, and insects murmuring;
And while the youthful year's prolific art —
Of bud, leaf, blade, and flower — was fashioning
Abodes where self-disturbance hath no part."

And now ponder o'er the multitudinous pieces, on which *the Poet's* hand was employed, to depict the lovely aspect of Spring, and find, if you can, in a like number of consecutive lines, the sweetness of awakening morn so charmingly portrayed as by Bloomfield, in his transport of the feathered race:

"The Blackbird strove with emulation sweet,
And Echo answered from her close retreat;
The sporting White-throat on some twig's end borne,
Poured hymns to freedom and the rising morn;

Stopt in his song, perchance, the starting Thrush
Shook a white shower from off the blackthorn bush,
Where dewdrops thick as early blossoms hung,
And trembled as the minstrel sweetly sung."

Perhaps there is scarcely to be found in the wide theatre of Nature, a more interesting subject for contemplation than that of lambs at play. Their habits are of that distinctive character which none but an eye-witness can describe; and he who, having watched them, shall fail to seize on the chief points of attraction, must be radically defective in those qualities of the mind that answer to the requirements of descriptive poetry. Both Wordsworth and Bloomfield loitered amidst their gambols; and each resolved to paint the scene from Nature. But it will at once be seen by those who have feasted on pastoral diversions, that whilst one has sketched but a vague, dreamy outline of his subject, the other has filled up the picture with the skill of a consummate artist.

Wordsworth: composed on a May morning, 1838.

"Life with yon lambs, like day, is just begun,
Yet Nature seems to them a heavenly guide.
Does joy approach? they meet the coming tide;
And sullenness avoid, as now they shun
Pale twilight's lingering glooms, — and in the sun
Couch near their dams, with quiet satisfied;
Or gambol — each with his shadow at his side,
Varying its shape wherever he may run.
As they from turf yet hoar with sleepy dew
All turn, and court the shining and the green,
Where herbs look up, and opening flowers are seen;
Why to God's goodness cannot We be true,
And so, His gifts and promises between,
Feed to the last on pleasures ever new?"

Bloomfield:

" A few begin a short but vigorous race,
And Indolence abashed soon flies the place;
Thus challenged forth, see thither one by one,
From every side assembling playmates run;
A thousand wily antics mark their stay,
A starting crowd, impatient of delay.
Like the fond dove from fearful prison freed,
Each seems to say, 'Come, let us try our speed;'
Away they scour, impetuous, ardent, strong,
The green turf trembling as they bound along;
Adown the slope, then up the hillock climb,
Where every molehill is a bed of thyme;
There panting stop; yet scarcely can refrain, —
A bird, a leaf, will set them off again;
Or, if a gale with strength unusual blow,
Scattering the wild-briar roses into snow,
Their little limbs increasing efforts try,
Like the torn flower the fair assemblage fly.
Ah, fallen rose! sad emblem of their doom,
Frail as thyself, they perish while they bloom!"

Not to load the text with unnecessary quotations, I hold that a candid inquiry into the respective merits of Wordsworth and Bloomfield, can end in no other conviction than that, as the poet of Nature, the latter preserves a uniform superiority; and that, notwithstanding its brevity, "the Farmer's Boy" contains more solid instruction than is to be gleaned from the voluminous writings of the founder of the Lake school. And incompetent as was the late Laureate to treat with becoming dignity the simple manifestations of Providence in the external world, it is easy to conceive how great must have been his embarrassment, when attempting to

estimate the strength and scope of Byron's genius by reference to his own standard. As well might a youth on the lowest form at Eton presume to determine the proficiency of a senior wrangler, — or the flippant novelist to compass the range of thought implied in the science of metaphysics. If the humblest walk of Nature proved attractive to Wordsworth, it is equally certain that Byron's elasticity of soul demanded a loftier region; and had he chosen to represent virtue in her fairest aspect, and vice in its true deformity, he would have found an enduring place in the affections of posterity. Meekness in the abstract would not have supplied this desideratum: his defect lay in a moral insensibility to the obligations of life. With all the intellectual qualities that could fit him for adorning the high station to which he belonged, he lacked the gift that Heaven alone can impart, and for the most obvious reason — he never sought it. But because it pleased him to dwell in a voluptuous circle, and to represent the artificial manners of society, efforts have been made to depreciate his character as a poet. Such was done in the instance of Pope; and Campbell's defence of him so pertinently applies to Byron, that I shall dispose of the subject by transcribing it. Alluding to Mr. Bowles's disparagement of the bard of Twickenham, he says that this gentleman, in forming his estimate, "lays great stress upon the argument that Pope's images are drawn from art more than from nature. That Pope was neither so insensible to the beauties of nature, nor so indistinct in describing them, as to forfeit the character of a genuine poet, is what I mean to urge, without exaggerating his picturesqueness. But before speaking of that quality in

his writings, I would beg leave to observe, in the first place, that the faculty by which a poet luminously describes objects of art is essentially the same faculty which enables him to be a faithful describer of simple nature; in the second place, that nature and art are to a greater degree relative terms in poetical description than is generally recollected; and, thirdly, that artificial objects and manners are of so much importance in fiction, as to make the exquisite description of them no less characteristic of genius than the description of simple physical appearances. The poet is 'creation's heir.' He deepens our social interest in existence. It is surely by the liveliness of the interest which he excites in existence, and not by the class of subjects which he chooses, that we most fairly appreciate the genius or the life of life which is in him. It is no irreverence to the external charms of nature to say, that they are not more important to a poet's study than the manners and affections of his species.—Why then try Pope, or any other poet, exclusively by his powers of describing inanimate phenomena? Nature, in the wide and proper sense of the word, means life in all its circumstances—nature moral as well as external. As the subject of inspired fiction, nature includes artificial forms and manners."

Determined that none of his rivals should escape the punishment due to their presumption, in having written conformably to the acknowledged rules of art, *the Poet* completed his strictures with the following grand corollary, in which he counsels as well the rising genius of his day:

"A *Poet!* — He hath put his heart to school,
Nor dares to move unpropped upon the staff
Which Art hath lodged within his hand — must laugh
By precept only, and shed tears by rule.
Thy Art be Nature; the live current quaff,
And let the groveller sip his stagnant pool,
In fear that else, when critics grave and cool
Have killed him, Scorn should write his epitaph.
How does the Meadow-flower its bloom unfold?
Because the lovely little flower is free
Down to its root, and, in that freedom, bold;
And so the grandeur of the Forest-tree
Comes not by casting in a formal mould,
But from its *own* divine vitality."

A moment's reflection will be sufficient to convince a person of ordinary understanding, that the doctrine thus heedlessly enjoined is wholly indefensible. It assumes that the "meadow-flower," as a type of universal Nature, developes itself without respect to any definite law; and that the poet will best succeed in delineating its character, who shall undertake the task in the absence of all device. What! is it to be supposed that He "who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance," takes no closer cognizance of His works than to leave the flower of the field to the result of chance? The bashful novice might have refuted him with the aid of Pope:

"All Nature is but Art unknown to thee"—

Nay, he refuted himself, as he very commonly did: for to say that "the forest-tree" derives "grandeur" "from

its *own* divine vitality," is but to confess the evidence of *design* in its growth. And now, in a "valedictory sonnet," he repudiates, with singular inconsistency, the very dogma he has been inculcating:

> "Reader, farewell! My last words let them be —
> If in this book Fancy and Truth agree;
> If simple Nature trained by careful Art
> Through it have won a passage to thy heart;
> Grant me thy love, I crave no other fee!"

By this time the reviewer may have begun to surmise, that a higher motive than one of personal vindictiveness suggested the critical reflections on Wordsworth's verse, which have brought down upon me the unqualified condemnation of his friends. Be that, however, as it may, I deem it incumbent on me to assure those whose curiosity has been awakened on the subject, that no covert desire to avenge a real or imaginary grievance has provoked me to hostility. I had not the honour of an acquaintance with the late Laureate; nor am I conscious of having seen him; and I can have no reason to suppose that he ever perpetrated on me the slightest injustice in thought, word, or deed. Except from public report, I was in entire ignorance of his character as a poet, until the year 1849, when I purchased a copy of his works; and though ill requited for the time and labour consumed in reading them, I recollected that a much greater man * than myself had needed the encouragement of a friend to perseverance, under like circumstances; and I thereupon redoubled my application. Increasing assiduity only established my first convictions;

* Mr. Justice Talfourd.

and now discarding the authority of great names and specious representations, I determined to engage in a critical analysis of *the Poet's* verse, with a view to correct the popular misconception that prevailed respecting his merit. From this task I was diverted by growing bodily infirmities. As a preliminary step to the design, I had already written a few metrical pieces, illustrative of the author's littleness of thought and execution, — some of which were included in the volume of poetry I published a year ago. The satire, headed "Pastimes with the late Poet Laureate," affected his reputation in so much, that I felt bound to justify the liberties I had taken with him in my "Introduction" to the book. This gave more umbrage than the satire itself, for the simple reason — that it was based on irrefragable truth. What was to be done with so grave an offender? The ingenuity and malevolence of my reviewers were immediately taxed to find the basest motives to which my conduct might be imputed; whilst agreeing, almost unanimously, to inflict a castigation that should doom me to perpetual oblivion. In thus exercising their prowess, they foolishly miscalculated both their own strength and mine. Nor is it surprising that they should have done so; for, emboldened by long success in this iniquitous career, they have grown insensible to the probability of failure; and therefore reckoned as confidently on silencing me with impudent declamation, as though they had possessed the combined advantage of a good cause and higher intelligence. That men of refined literary taste yet abound is beyond dispute: but it has been well said that "their still voice is drowned in the clamours of a multitude, who judge by fashion of poetry, as of dress.

The truth is, to judge aright requires almost as much genius as to write well; and good critics are as rare as great poets." Not many of this class are recognised in the periodicals of the day. Their talents demand a more lucrative appropriation; and but for the flourishing condition of the few public journals, in the conduct of which interest is made subordinate to principle, we should scarcely know of their existence. At the head of such journals is "*The Times*," whose "leaders" would have done honour to Burke, and whose critical disquisitions bear testimony to the permanent influence of Johnson and his confederates on this department of our national literature. A convenient illustration of the fact occurs to me in a review of Tennyson's "In Memoriam," as published in "*The Times*" of Nov. 28th, 1851, where the following passage is recorded. "A frequent source of mist and doubtfulness in language is a habit, either wilful or indifferent, of grammatical inaccuracy. Mr. Tennyson is quite autocratic in his government of words. Substantives are flung upon the world without the slightest provision for their maintenance; active and passive verbs exchange duties with astonishing ease and boldness, and particles are disbanded by a summary process unknown to Lindley Murray or Dr. Latham. Look at these instances out of many:

'I brim with sorrow drowning song.'— xix.

'Each voice four changes on the wind.'— xxviii.

'Thine own shall wither in the vast.'— lxxiv.

'A happy lover who has come
To look on her that loves him well;
Who *lights* and rings the gateway bell,
And *learns her* gone, and far from home.'— viii.

"Here it is evident that '*lights*' and '*learns*' are used with extreme incorrectness. The construction requires us to suppose that the lover arrives in a dark evening with a lantern, and gropes about the brick wall until he finds the bell. Just look at the circumstance as Jones might relate it to a young lady in the suburbs — 'I got into the Kennington omnibus yesterday, and in the hope of finding you at home, I light and ring the bell, and learn you gone.' Would such an epistle be understandable? If the object of his devotion be a girl of spirit, she will instantly cut off six heads, and send Jones a copy of Mr. Edwards' *Progressive English Exercises* by the next post. Will the Germanic cloud-compelling school permit us to recommend to their patient meditation a short saying of Hobbes, which need not be confined to Mr. Tennyson's ear? — 'The order of words, when placed as they ought to be, carries a light before it, whereby a man may foresee the length of his period; as a torch in the night showeth a man the stops and unevenness of the way.'" The justice of these remarks no man of education will be hardy enough to deny: then what must be his contempt for a reviewer that should cite this very stanza for its gracefulness! And such was actually done by a writer in "Sharpe's London Journal," by way of facilitating the progress of public enlightenment! Nor be it supposed that the blunder was of accidental occurrence, or that "Sharpe" stands beneath his more ostentatious rivals. By whatever title these public organs are known, as the "Literary Gazette," "The Critic," &c., they are, for the most part, conducted by impudent adventurers, whose periodical spawnings serve but to corrupt the taste and pervert the

judgment, of less educated members of the community. In the republic of letters, these men hold the same relation to the practised scholar that the brazen empiric does to the accomplished physician. Even Wordsworth despised them; and it is not too much to say that, had he designated the nameless critic by the two fearful monosyllables that rhyme with "grave and cool," he might easily have justified the propriety of their application.

After this exposition of the late Laureate's superficial knowledge of the subject he professed to have most at heart, it may be reasonably asked how one of such feeble pretensions can have risen in public estimation. The question is of easy solution. In the earlier stage of his progress, as already intimated, the reading of critical Reviews was almost wholly confined to men of learning. These instruments then were few; and none but writers of extraordinary parts could find employment on them. No sooner did Wordsworth come under their notice than his worthlessness was discovered, and published to the very ends of the earth. In process of time the Legislature, and all others concerned in the public weal, began to foresee the national benefits that would accrue from the spread of education; and various institutions were raised for the accomplishment of this end. Reading became general; and Reviews multiplied accordingly. But to have put into the hands of this new school a journal teeming with speculative or analytical disquisitions, would have been to excite disgust. Their meaner tastes and capacities demanded a corresponding provision; and teachers were sought who could adapt themselves to the exigencies of the occasion. The choice›

however, was of necessity confined to those of an inferior class—the low price at which a popular journal must be sold to bring it within reach of the million, precluding access to authorities of acknowledged distinction. And thus the conduct of these organs fell to the charge of the comparatively illiterate, who, lacking not the self-reliance of abler men, rushed boldly into the field of criticism. With none to dispute the equitableness of their decisions, whom they would they set up, and whom they would they put down. This was but the natural result of an irresponsible power. Their offences, nevertheless, admit of extenuation. From the constitutional tone and disposition of their minds, they would entertain a predilection for any effort of genius that should be found in the track of a "*Reading made Easy;*" whilst they would spurn with becoming indignation an exercise of thought that should surpass their comprehension. Wordsworth to them was a veritable god-send! His feeble nursery rhymes conveyed a charm that no previous combination of simple terms and phrases had revealed: but being occasionally reminded that reviewers of higher character had denounced such rhymes as nonsense, they affected to discover in them a subtile essence, which, by some indefinable process of elaboration, might realise for humanity the blessedness of heaven. To those who could be pleased with Coleridge's philosophy, when, if allowed to start from no premises, and come to no conclusion, he would talk transcendently for two hours, this doctrine may seem very feasible; but beyond that refined circle it is doomed never to pass. Concurrently with the progress of education appeared a growing ambition for poetical renown. A large proportion of those who could

read verse essayed to write it; and, as by common consent, they adopted Wordsworth as their model. Byron was inimitable; Moore equally so: but the parent of the Lake school they *could* approach. And when having gratified their aspirations, they gladly hailed the verdict that pronounced him to be the most profound of living poets: nor will it be until this class shall have been still more highly cultivated, that, by one unanimous voice, he will be declared to have been the greatest literary impostor of his time.

THE END.

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